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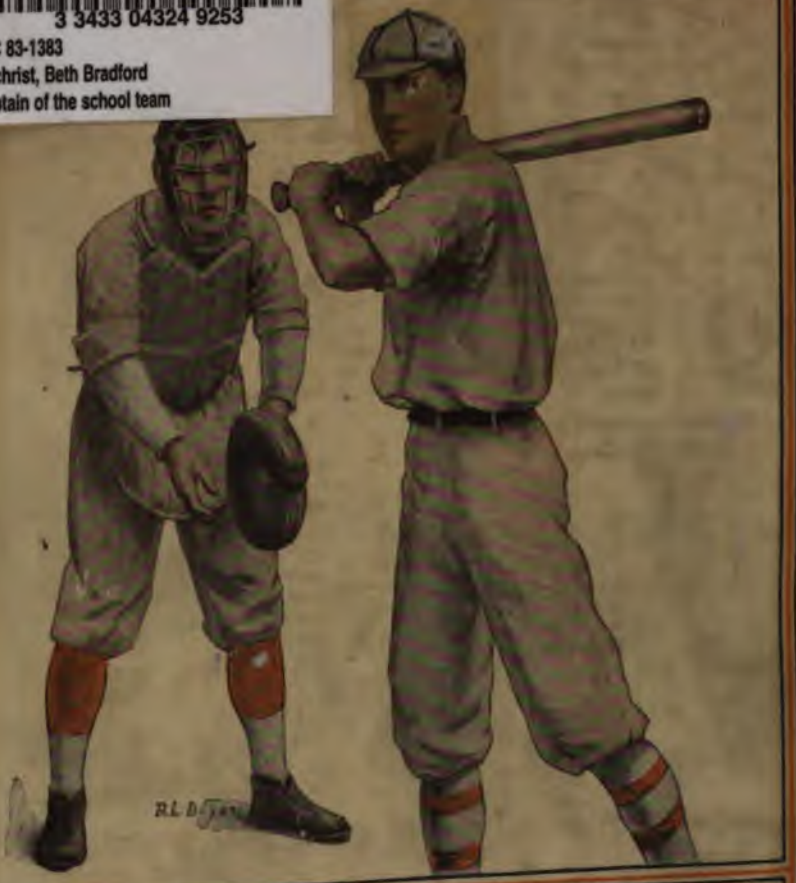

CAPTAIN OF THE SCHOOL TEAM

JOHN PRESCOTT EARL

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[redacted]PTAIN OF THE SCHOOL TEAM

Bob Farrar, captain of the Standham Academy football eleven, has a hard problem on his hands in the attempt to beat Conway, the rival school.

It looks as though Conway were playing a professional on their team, but Bob refuses to protest him. In the end it turns out he was right.

There is lots of genuine boy fun, boy talk, and boy character in the story.

Other books in this Series are:

ON THE SCHOOL TEAM.
THE SCHOOL TEAM IN CAMP.
SCHOOL TEAM ON THE DIAMOND.

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THE NEW GRAND-STAND

Captain of the School Team

BY

John Prescott Earl

Author of
"On the School Team"
"The School Team in Camp"
"The School Team on the Diamond"

Illustrated by Ralph L. Boyer

The Penn Publishing Company Philadelphia

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Introduction

Boys who have read "On the School Team" and "The School Team in Camp" need no introduction to Bob Farrar and those of his friends who at Standham Academy are known as "the Crowd." There is Ned Denslow, a "crackerjack" at baseball and good at football, too, between whom and Bob was long rivalry and misunderstanding last year, as told in "On the School Team." Shorty Forbes Bob once described as "always the longest thing in sight in the landscape." Ned Hensley is Shorty's roommate, as Jack Truman, president of the athletic association, is Bob's. "Scrap" Hayes and "Spud" Thurston, Hunt and Breck also belong to "the Crowd." Tom Thompson is a little chap who under Bob's coaching learned to run last year and who persisted in running until he won a race. Tom's father was so delighted that he gave Standham a new grand stand.

It was after a tie game with Conway Academy, Standham's dearest enemy, that Bob, the popular quarter-back, was elected captain

of the football team. The biggest problem the new captain saw ahead of him was to find a reliable and aggressive center for the eleven. While they were having all kinds of fun at Bob's summer camp in the Maine woods, "the Crowd" found him in the person of Clayton Thorn, a New Yorker temporarily very much down on his luck. Thorn had played center on several school elevens, for he had been a good deal of a rolling stone in his school life, and, as related in "The School Team in Camp," Bob and the others persuaded him to try Standham Academy for a year. They are sure that he can help them win the game against Conway. Whether they are right or not remains to be seen in these pages.

But the football season is only a part of senior year. There is more about it in "The School Team on the Diamond."

JOHN PRESCOTT EARL.

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Captain of the School Team

CHAPTER I

BACK TO STANDHAM

THE trolley marked "Standham Academy" drew to a stop at the railway corner in Eastville, and the crowd of boys waiting there began to swarm aboard. Suit cases, golf clubs, tennis rackets, banjo and mandolin cases, all the miscellany of luggage that attends a return to school, were wedged under seats, between knees, and into every available opening.

"Oh, never mind a little thing like a fellow's feet," remarked Shorty Forbes to a boy who, after planting a suit case squarely on his toes, had prepared to sit down on it.

The boy straightened hastily and turned his head over a trim gray shoulder toward Shorty. "I beg your pardon," he said anxiously. "Did—did it hit you anywhere?"

"No offense taken. My pedal extremities are so small, folks always forget to allow

for 'em. I'm thinking of hanging out a sign, 'Cave pedem,' or something like that. You're new, aren't you? If it's all the same to you, suppose you turn round."

The boy threw a slantwise glance at his questioner, a twinkle slowly kindling in his eye. "Could you turn around," he demanded, "with four suit cases in front of you, a violin jammed between your legs and retreat blocked by those fairy appendages we've just heard mentioned?"

Shorty chuckled. "That's not so bad. What's your name? Mine's Forbes."

"Bolton."

"Ho, Dave Bolton of Aurora, New York, entering senior middler."

"How'd you know?"

"How? Because I'm a wizard. Don't you forget it. Second Merlin. Hi, there, Spud! Come to my arms, Spuddie-boy!"

Spud, clambering over the guard rail, found himself seized and dragged to a seat on Shorty's knees, where he was jounced up and down to an accompanying commotion among the suit cases near.

Scrap, three rows ahead, shouted jubilant

greeting. "Leave any articles in the car this time, Spud?"

"Why, hello, Scrap! Hello! Go back and look if you want to make sure. Yi-yi, there's Thompson! Say, couldn't you find anything more to cart along?"

Little Tom, a suit case in either hand and a bag of golf clubs under one arm, eyed the full car anxiously.

"Come ahead, Thompson! Room for a 'steenth in here," yelled Scrap hospitably. Much pushing and shoving made good Scrap's words.

"You fellows missed it when you bucked Bob's bid for camp this summer," Jack was informing a group by the motorman. "Didn't they, Breck?"

"You bet! Biggest lark I ever struck. We'll talk you blind about that camp."

"Don't rub it in. Isn't it bad enough not to have been able to go?"

"Who was there, anyway?"

"Shorty, Scrap, Hunt, Spud, Hensley—Denslow! Oh, Denslow! Come up and tell these chaps what they missed in missing Bob's camp."

Bandying greetings with the car load as he passed, Denslow ranged alongside. "Any room up there?" he asked dubiously.

"Sure. Always room at the front."

A train clattered across the bridge overhead into the station and another avalanche poured down the iron stairs to the trolley line. The conductor pulled the bell-cord.

"We can't take care of all that bunch," he said. "Let 'em wait for the next."

A little in advance of the coming crowd raced two figures. The car greeted the foremost with a yell.

"Come on, cap'n!"

"Step lively, Bob!"

"Right up here, Farrar. Give us that suit case!"

Bob swung himself to the lower step of the now swiftly moving car and grinned reply to the storm of "Hellos" that broke over his head. Behind Bob, his companion in the chase had found a footing. He was a stranger to most of the throng, but here and there a hand waved wildly to him and a mouth shouted unintelligibly in the babel.

Suddenly Shorty's tall form heaved itself

aloft, his glance peered over the sea of heads, and his deep voice boomed across the tumult.

"Hello, Bobby, my son! That you, partner? Howdy! Holding on by your eyelashes? Send those suit cases over here. Spud can tend 'em."

"I never ——" began Spud.

"S-sh," Shorty admonished gently. "I hold Spud. Spud holds suit cases. See?"

The car grinned.

Some one punched Shorty in the ribs. "Who's the fellow with Farrar? We want to know back here."

"Thorn—Clayton Thorn."

"That doesn't mean anything to us. What's he doing on this car?"

"What we're all doing, going to Standham."

"To school?"

"Sure."

"Entering high, of course."

"Senior."

"Looks like he'd be good for something."

Shorty nodded. "Looks so," he assented.

"Oh, I say," interrupted another voice. "Is there any law against talking, Shorty?"

"Hadn't heard of it."

"Well then, what's he good for?"

Shorty beamed. "Catching fish and running a news stand are two of his specialties."

Spud could contain himself no longer. "Maybe you'll find out something else that Thorn's good for before the term is out," he hinted mysteriously.

Two seats ahead, other boys were discussing the same subject. "Name's Thorn, Hunt says. The Crowd picked him up in the Maine woods at Bob's camp. He took a shine to our fellows and decided to come here to school."

"Great chap, according to Hayes."

"There's a surprise about him, I'll bet. Did you see how Scrap grinned when he talked and bit off the ends of his sentences closer'n ever, as if he was afraid he'd let something out?"

"What do you s'pose——"

"Don't s'pose. Fellow looks decent, anyhow. Farrar will be limbering us up tomorrow, won't he?"

"Reckon so. I'm going out on the field myself. Just to help along with practice. If

Standham's to beat Conway this fall, we must all chip in and help."

"Sure thing. We'll do it, too."

"Beat? Well, I don't know. We can try."

Dave Bolton, jammed into his post of vantage between two seats, hearing all this and much more, eyed Bob and his companion sprinter curiously.

"What's Farrar captain of?" he asked a boy near by.

"Football team," was the answer. "Best all round athlete in school, too. Play yourself?"

Bolton shook his head.

The other relapsed into the give and take of vacation experiences from which the question had called him.

Football, thought the new boy; everywhere, football. Wasn't there anything to school but games? His whimsical eyes turned toward the country through which the car was speeding; softly rolling fields stretched away to patches of woods and low hills, blue in the early autumn haze. He began to fancy Standham Academy as a

machine into one end of which boys were poured hit or miss, after a few turns of the crank to come out at the other a stream of leather-suited, head-harnessed and shin-guarded football elevens, lightly-clad runners, khaki-colored baseball nines. He amused himself turning the picture over and over in his mind, adding a ball here, a bat there, till a tower came in sight above the trees.

"There's old Center!"

The tower developed an attendant building, set in the midst of an orderly jumble of other brick walls, ivy covered, and the car slid to a stop at Standham Academy. Across the grass more figures raced to join a group that was dancing excitedly about the track, meeting the newcomers with the bits of information that are the rightful property of first arrivals.

"Everybody to the grand stand!" shouted Ned Hensley through a megaphone. "This way to the grand stand! Newest sight at Standham Academy. Don't miss it! Hi there, Tom Thompson! Say, fellows, take Thompson to see the grand stand! Right across the campus is the grand stand. Close

handy by." Ned's voice blared on in a kind of singsong chant.

Boys dropped their suit cases on the grass with a yell, and started for the athletic field, a hilarious, straggling procession. At the head Bob and Jack raced with little Tom between them. Shorty reached down and ran an arm through Bolton's where the latter stood uncertainly. "Drop those things," he commanded, "and come on. Haven't you ever studied ancient history? When in Rome do as the Romans do. Wait for Shorty, partner!"

The next minute he shot through the hurrying lines ahead, propelling the two new boys, willy-nilly, to the front. Thorn ran with the free breath of a trained athlete; Bolton, shorter and slimmer than the others, panted a little when he reached the field. There they all marched three times around the fine new grand stand and cheered long for Thompson and Thompson's father, who was responsible for their excitement, having given the grand stand on his spring visit. Then it became necessary to try the seats. And while they were trying them, Shorty mounted on

the railing and made a speech that used up in laughter the little breath they had left from yelling.

Bolton was wiping the tears out of his eyes when Shorty rejoined him. "Now," said that young man, "let's go back to the car and pick up our duds and then we'll hunt up the office and find out where you're to live. I'm in Stone. So are a good many other nice fellows, Farrar here for one. This is Bolton, Bob." He added in an undertone something that Bolton did not catch.

"Glad to know you, Bolton. Dave, isn't it—from Aurora, New York? Scrap, come over here and meet Dave Bolton."

Scrap nodded to the new boy. "Hello," he said. "Did your ears burn any this summer, Bolton?"

Shorty halted Spud and Breck, and the next minute they broke in on the group around the new boy. "We heard about Bolton, too," they cried, "and we think we ought to know him."

The newcomer found himself walking back along the way he had so hastily come, in company with the Crowd, though he did not

then know it was the Crowd, and wondering how these boys happened to know his name and where his home was, and what it could be that they had heard about him. As they went other boys joined them, and some had words to say to Bob about the coming football season.

"You don't play, Bolton?" Denslow remarked.

And Bolton, wondering again, shook his head.

"Is it all football here?" he asked Shorty as they pushed through the big oak doors into Center Hall.

Shorty stared. "Oh, I remember, you don't go in for it, do you? Tennis is your stunt."

Bolton stopped. "How do you know?" he demanded. "I haven't been in this place half an hour, and every fellow I meet seems to have my name and habits at his tongue's end. How do you know?"

A reminiscent grin spread over Shorty's face. "Didn't I tell you my other name was Merlin? But the fact is we looked you up last summer to see if you'd do stunts on the gridiron this fall."

Again that slow twinkle kindled in the other's eyes. He laughed outright. "I see. So you take as much trouble as that! You didn't gain much for your pains in my case."

"Can't say we did, to be frank."

"Heard I was a grind, did you?"

"Nothing so bad as that. Heard that you play tennis and brush your clothes pretty often and haven't the build for a rush line. Anything the matter with that?"

"Who told you?"

Shorty relented. "Ever know a fellow named Dyce?"

"Frank Dyce? He's my cousin."

"So we found out up at camp in the Maine woods last summer."

"You know Frank, then! Why didn't you say so before? Do all these other chaps know him, too?"

"They do," said Shorty, "but they got word to leave his name out of conversation for a bit. See?"

Bolton laughed. "I see, Mr. Merlin. Frank's description must have been a good fit. It's nearly two years since I've seen him, though."

"He got you too short," said the senior critically. "And he omitted to mention the grind part."

"Maybe that's come on lately," suggested Bolton.

"Have you got 'em bad?" pursued Shorty.

The twinkle deepened in the newcomer's eyes. "Pretty pronounced case." He took his turn at questioning. "Say, honest, isn't there anything but football here? Any debates? Any school papers?"

"What do you take us for? Standham's got the whole outfit. A fellow finds here what he's looking for, and a few extras thrown in sometimes. See that sleepy looking chap in gray? Looks as if he hadn't half an idea in his head? That's Heicher, the editor of the monthly 'Standard.' Fellow with him, Blair, runs the 'Weekly.' Oh, yes, Standham's got most that's going. But there's no denying we come out pretty strong on football until Thanksgiving."

Ahead of them Bob was bending over to register. "He's captain, I hear," said Bolton. "And you ——?"

"Manager."

The whimsical eyes lightened. "My record must have given you the blues. Hope you had better luck with somebody else. Any other football lights in this neighborhood? What's he?" nodding at Thorn.

Shorty lowered his voice mysteriously. "Perfect confidence, you understand. Cross your heart and hope to die?—Well, Clayton Thorn—can—play."

CHAPTER II

A COUNCIL OF TWO

Bob and Jack, who had decided to keep their old room in Stone another year, scrawled their names on the register and waited for Thorn to finish his interview with Mr. Wetherell.

"He'll be stuck in the attic of Horton," Spud prophesied gloomily. "What else can a fellow expect coming late like this?"

"Nothing else," agreed Bob, "but that's no sign he'll get it. Besides, isn't Horton better than that what-you-may-call-it place in Kansas?"

"Just because Spud's living in Stone this year he thinks Horton isn't on the Standham campus," chaffed Jack.

"That's all right," said Spud, "but just the same I'd like to have Thorn in the same house with us."

"Nothing grasping about you, Spud."

"You can call me a pig if you want to, Shorty."

"Thanks, but don't mention it."

The retort failed to draw Spud's fire, for Thorn was pushing his way toward them through the crowd.

"Nineteen Stone," he announced.

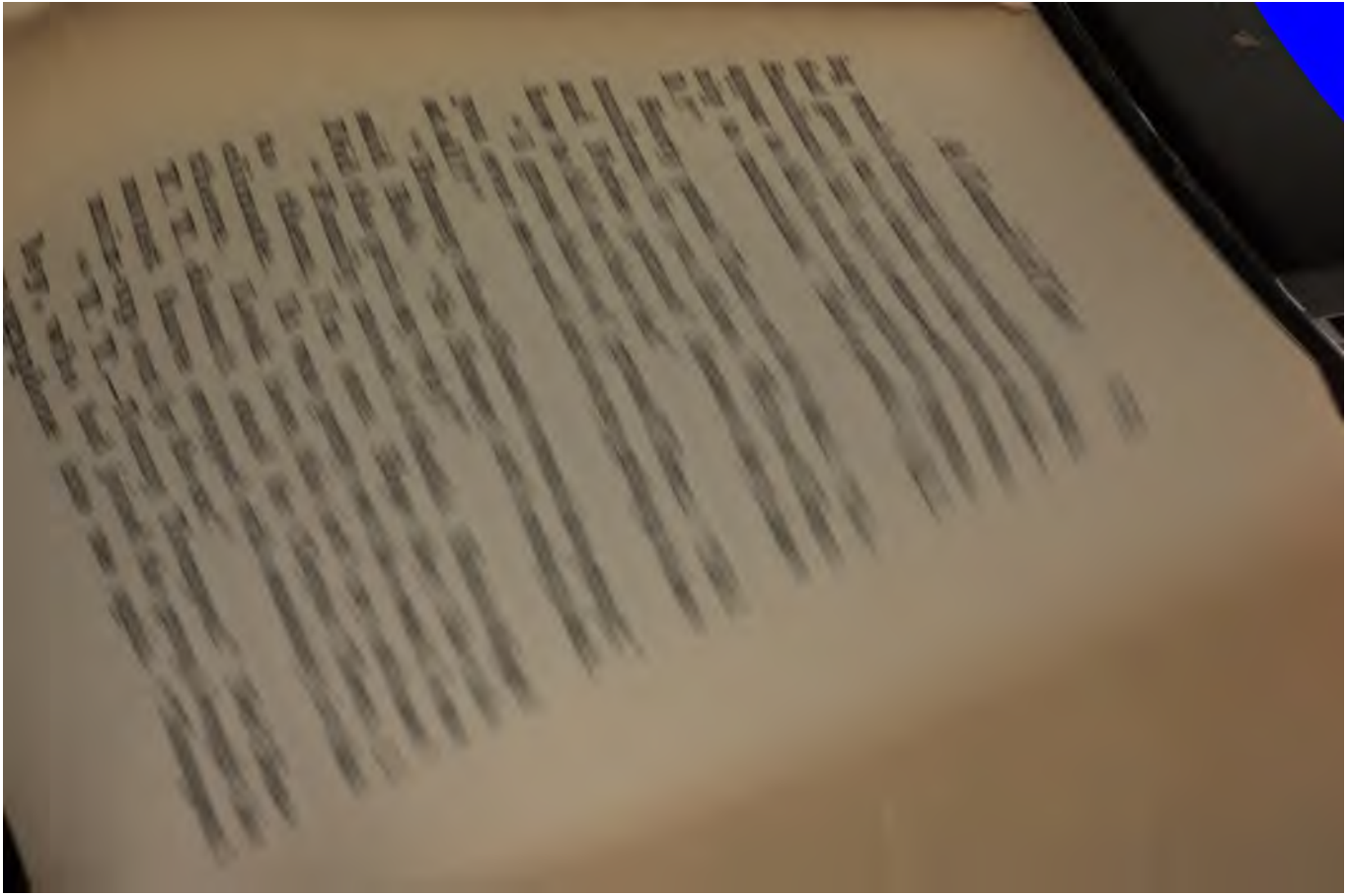
"Hurrah!" cried the Stonites.

"But nineteen!" gasped Bob and Jack together. "Those are Gid Sloane's rooms!" Then they both laughed at their use of the present tense.

"When do you suppose we'll get used to being seniors, Jackstraws?"

"And remember that Gid's a freshman now!" capped Jack. "But how'd you get 'em?" to Thorn.

"Pretty good, are they? Some fellow—I forget his name—isn't coming back, and Mr. Wetherell said, Did I want 'em? and I said I'd take anything I could get. Then he said they weren't the worst in the lot, or words to that effect, and that one of the old seniors would have a right to them before me, but that he thought all the seniors in Stone were rooming in doubles. It was this fellow's send-

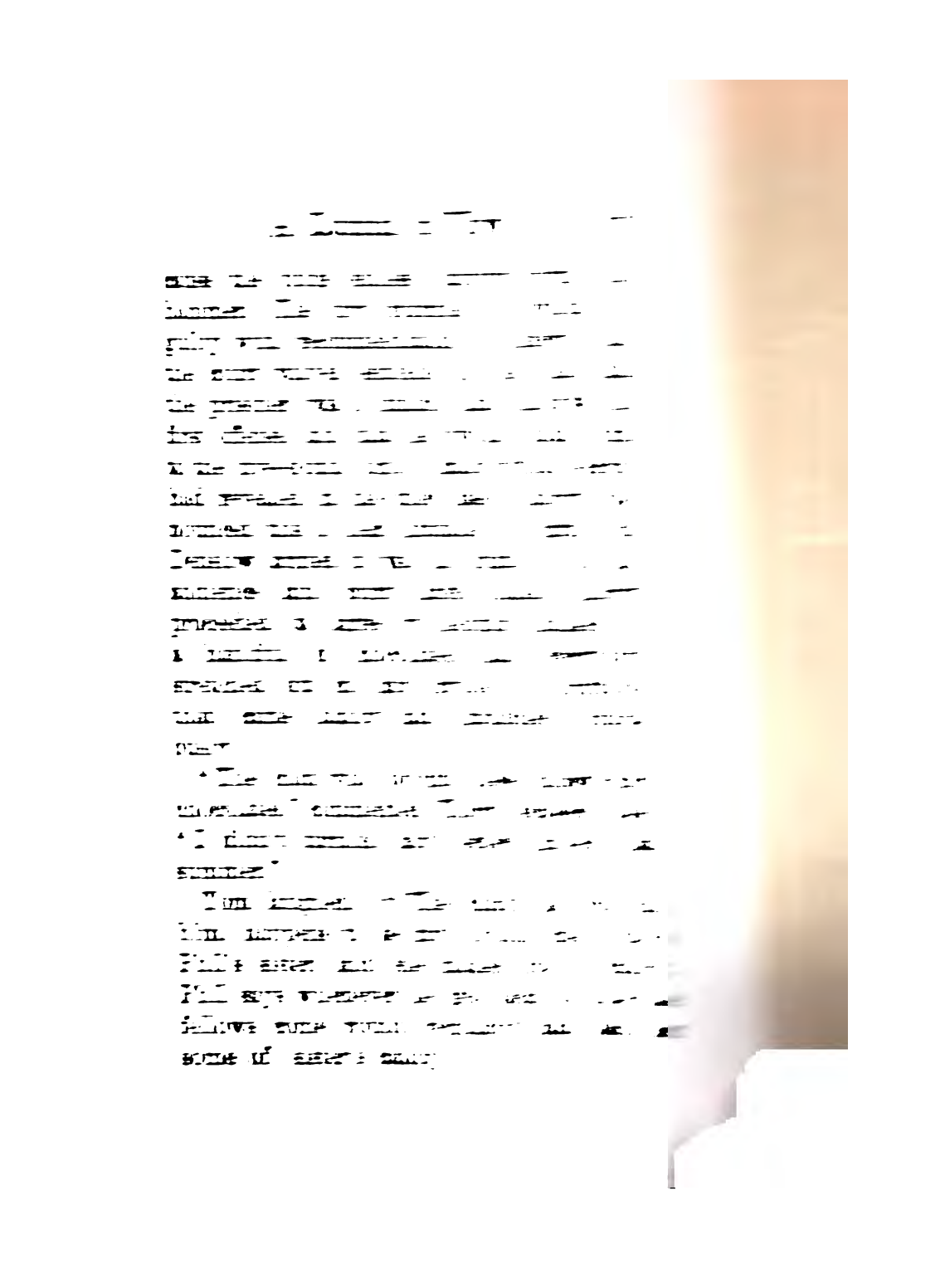


Thompson! Thompson's wanted for abduct ing a suit case!"

"Maybe you'll find him at Stone," volun- teered a boy near by. "He disappeared in that direction ten minutes ago."

"Run along, little boys," Shorty ordered. "And tell Tommy T. the next time he tries to lift a suit case not to leave his own in evi- dence. I'll be down presently."

So they all, whether they belonged ther or not, tramped across to Stone and clattere up to the rooms on the second floor that ha been Gid Sloane's. Ned Hensley and Jac Truman hunted out little Tom. They four him staring amazedly at the strange conten of the suit case he had just opened. Whe upon they pounced on him and bore boy a "loot," as Ned put it, down the hall i number nineteen, where, Shorty having rived, the Crowd proceeded to hold a m trial. Bob was judge and Shorty st attorney. Denslow appeared for the defe A jury hastily impaneled from other rc brought with it a growing audience, w pounded out such hilarious and impa applause of the hits of the rival lawyers



"Oh, I say," cried Scrap, "she didn't make all this herself!"

"Yes, she did, every bit, except that I helped her dip the chocolates. She says if she ever has to earn her own living she'll do it by making candy. Why, at Christmas and New Year's and birthdays you just ought to see the pantry shelves at her house!"

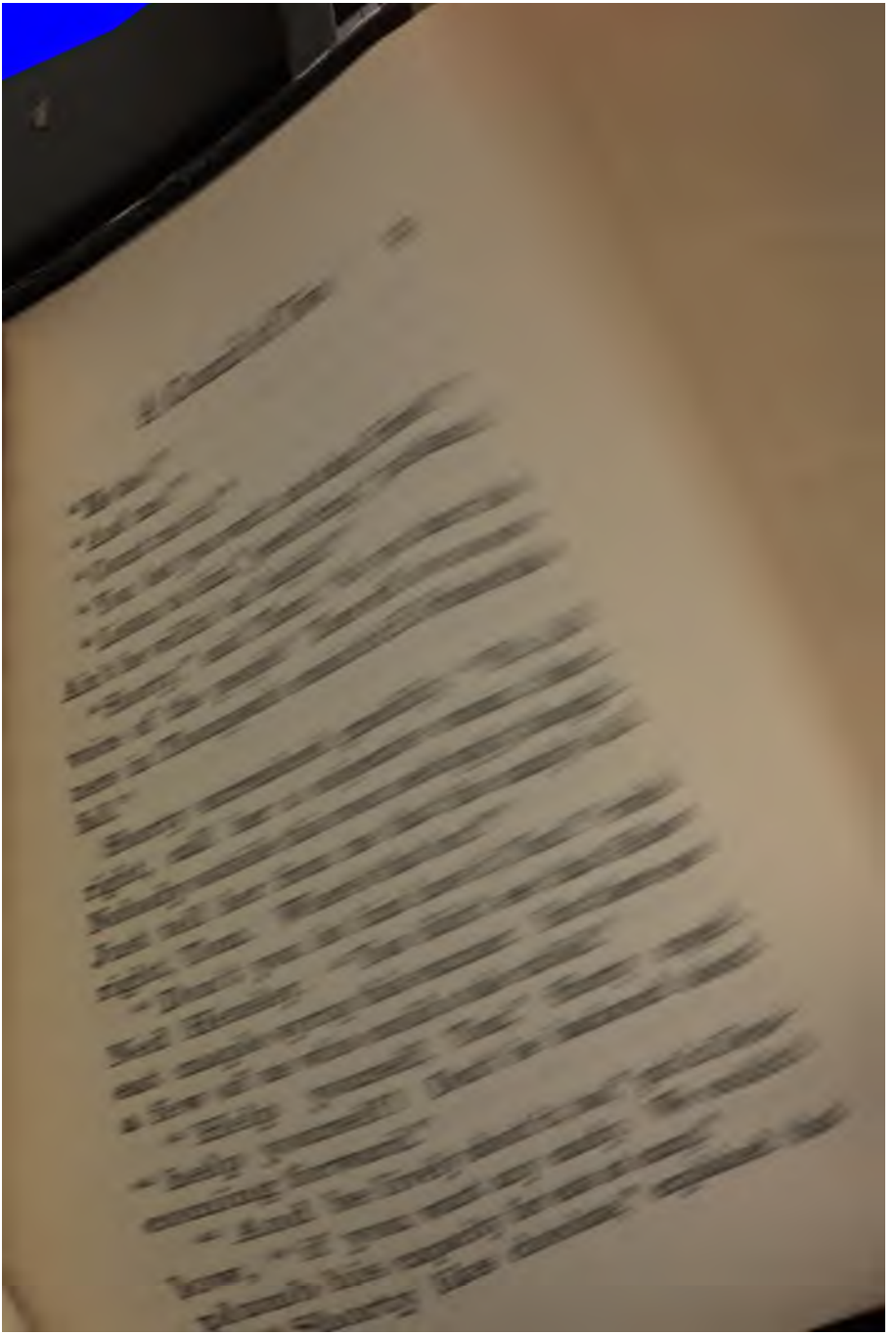
Shorty reached for the box. "Now that's a relative that I call worth having. Why don't you ask her up here some time this fall?"

"I have," said Tom. "I asked her for the Conway game, and she'll come. For a girl, she knows a lot about sport. She always goes to the big varsity games. She told me to tell you, Bob, if you'd promise her a winning eleven, she'd come sure."

"Tell her we'll do our best," said Bob.

"Oh, I told her we were going to wipe up the gridiron with Conway this year. And she laughed and said I'd better give you some candy right quick to-night then, before training began."

"I'll help you trot her about when she comes," proposed Shorty innocently.



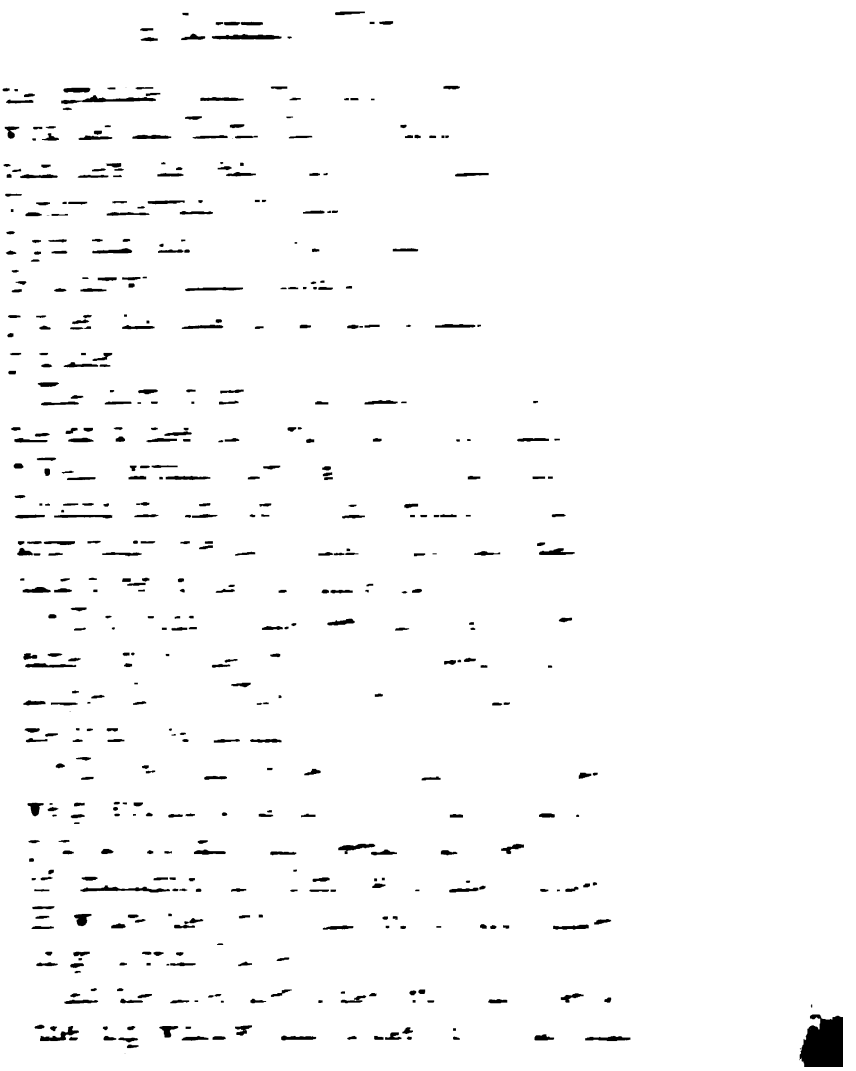
individual. "It pleases his æsophagus. So does maple syrup. And he didn't come to his sarcophagus from eating it either, the way some folks said he would. Poor Neddie! One night Neddie got scared."

But Ned Hensley in the open window wa busy exchanging remarks with a boy o the walk below. "Farrar? Yes, he's u here. . . . Eastville, three thirty-fou All right, I'll tell him." Ned turned bac into the room. "You're wanted at the tel phone at Center, Bob. Call up Eastvill three thirty-four."

"Who wants me?"

"Don't know. Jim would say, 'Mos along and find out.'"

Bob "moseyed." Three steps at a time dashed up the stairs again at Stone. In h own study he found Jack, Thorn and lit Tom. "It was Mr. Davenport," Bob plained. "He had business in Eastville a thought if he could locate me he'd run out Standham. Due to start for home to-nig He'll be on the next car. I'm going to d ner with him at the hotel. Leave the fix up till I get back, Jackstraws. Davenpo



and the sunset, and while fathers and mother and a few lingering summer guests to th right of them filled the room with chatte Bob checked off the state of such of the foo ball squad as he had chanced to see, windir up with the tale of Thorn and the camp.

Davenport heard him through with an a tention that grew more and more cheerful the story progressed. "Good!" he cri when it was finished. "Good! That w a summer's work worth while, Farrar. Y haven't seen him play, of course."

"No, but Dyce said he had a bit of a re tation when he was at Philadelphia, an oh, just to look at him, you can tell Thor a born center."

"That was the one position," said coach, "about which I've felt shaky knew Sloan was troubled over it last spr Didn't say anything to you, did he? T were men enough who with training w work well into the other positions, but no with the making of a first-rate cente him. This Thorn is Johnny-on-the- But you've been over all that. Now light ahead." They pushed back their ch

"I'll step into the office and find out what they can do about giving me a room for an hour or two. I want to talk to you alone."

They sat in the stiff sitting-room of a rented suite, while the boy switched on the lights. Davenport drew a chair out of a corner and motioned Bob to do the same. "Take the easiest you can find," he said with a wry smile, "and make yourself at home." The door shut on the departing boy and the two plunged into talk.

"I have been studying the problem of you on ever since the game last [illegible]," Davenport. "How [illegible] team out of the [illegible] you last N[illegible] on the q[illegible] tant is [illegible] school [illegible] s[illegible] way [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

Bob nodded. "Last year Gid trained for team work. He got the eleven solid, too, before the end of the season. I don't want to aim at that, exclusively, I mean, this year. Team work must be the foundation, of course, but I've had an idea of trying to work up individual plays, too. You see, we can't beat Conway by sheer strength; they'll have the heavier eleven. The only hope for us is to put more head into our play. I'd like to bring the team to a point where, while acting like one man's brain," Bob's eyes were wide and earnest, "it shall act like eleven men's bodies. Do you see what I mean? Sometimes I thought last year—you know I don't mean to criticize—Gid was a little too ready to sacrifice brilliant individual play to team work. I'd like if I could, while keeping the unity, to bring out every fellow's best. Thorn ought to be good for some strong plays, for instance."

"That's the ideal," said Davenport. "Each man feeling he has the whole team back of him for the best there is in him, just as surely as that he must subordinate himself most of the time for the sake of

solidarity. You've laid your finger on the weak spot in Sloane's eleven." He broke off abruptly. "Of course you've studied your men, Farrar?"

Bob nodded. "I've been thinking about it all summer, figuring out where each fellow would count for most. I know them pretty well, I think. There'll be surprises, of course. And Thorn is still to be learned. With last year's seniors we lost a lot. And I'm meditating a bit of a shake-up. Can't you stay and watch practice to-morrow? Of course the first day is not much good, but it shows a few things and I'd like your advice."

Davenport shook his head. "Can't do it. I'm sorry. I'll try and run over soon, though. I'll trust your judgment pretty far, Farrar. You're on the right track. You'll play quarter, of course."

Bob hesitated. "Yes—unless Denslow——"

"Play it. You're the one for the position. As an ex-quarter-back myself, I may speak with authority. There's only one fellow in school for quarter, and his name is Farrar. Denslow ought to make a strong full-back, un-

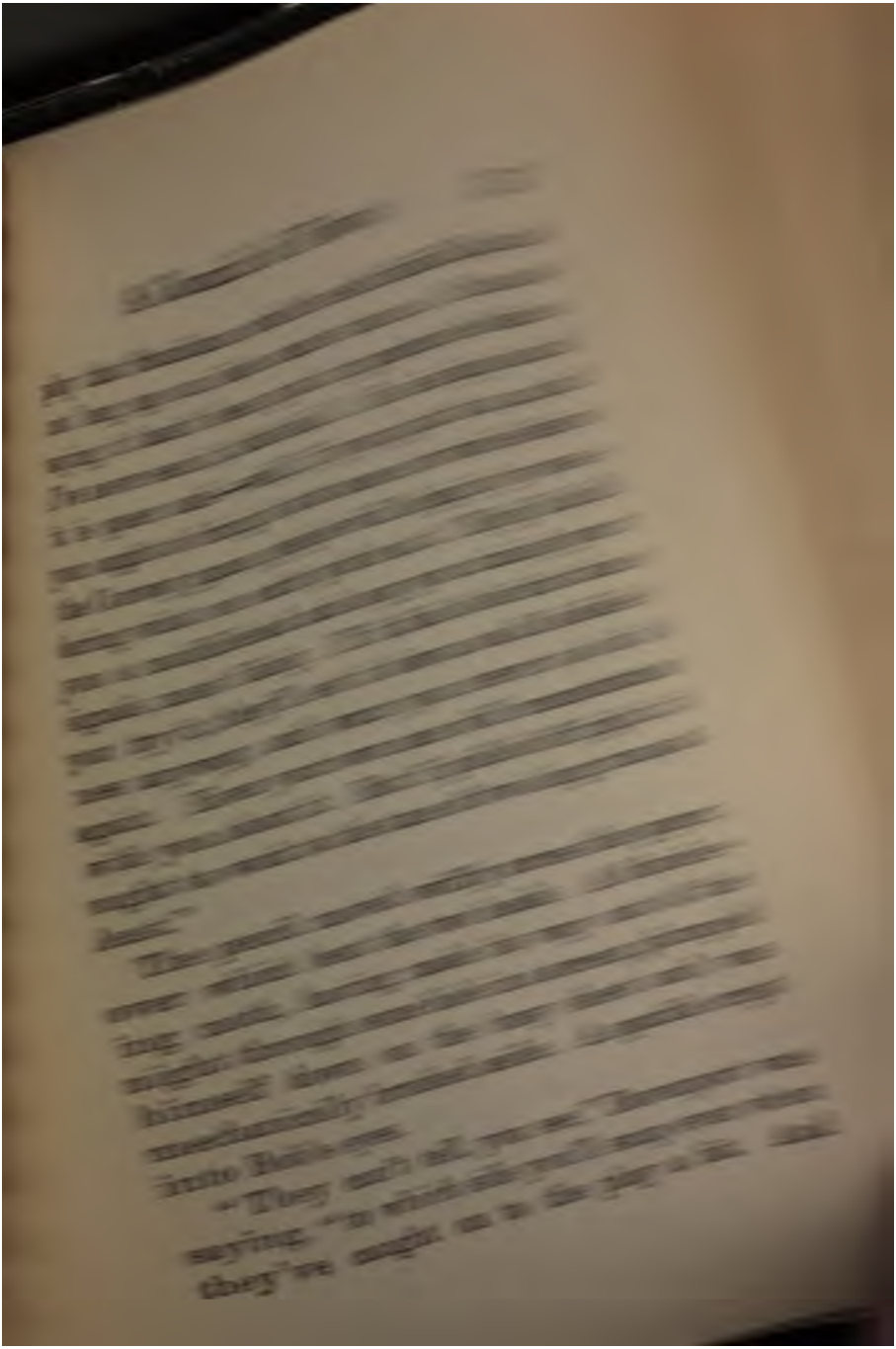
less ——" It was the man's turn to hesitate "Everything all right between you two?"

Bob flushed. "Yes, indeed. Ned's one of my best friends now."

"That's good. Play him in the back field then. I thought last fall that was his rea position. How about Harley Peters?"

"I've slated him, in my mind, for one o the ends. And there are a lot of fellow who say they'll get out on the gridiron th fall. Hunt, Scrap Hayes, Breck—you kno them? The boys are great about being read to pitch in and help, whether they hope make the team or not. I can count on the hard work I want, but when it comes the Conway game—and of course that is t one big goal we look forward to all the fal I'd like a bit of a surprise, what you calle while ago a 'specialty.'"

"And that is what I have to propose." young man drew his chair to the cherry t and motioned Bob to do the same. He pu a pencil and a bunch of letters from pocket, talking rapidly as he sought f clean page. "I've been mulling over situation for months, trying to think



here's this other chance, too. It will keep 'em jumping. What you want is an end, and a full-back, to use it more than once, upon whom you can absolutely depend. When the game is going just right, throw it on. And if the first time or two that you use it, the other side can tell what's doing before it's done, I'll eat my hat."

Bob's eyes were shining.

"Will you try it?"

"Try it?" gasped Bob. "You bet we'll try it. That's just what I wanted—a corking play."

"Keep it dark, of course."

"Secret practice," agreed Bob. "In a game or two before the one with Conway we'll give it the first and only airing."

Davenport nodded. "That's right. Prep schools can't trust too much to eleventh hour surprises. I've seen better plays than this fail on the first public trial. If this does," he looked at Bob keenly, "if it fails the first time, are you equal to taking what will be coming to you and to putting it on again?" He tapped the paper significantly.

Bob squared his shoulders. "Try me and
."

"You may have to stand up against the whole school, against people, too, whom you think know more than you. They will tell you that your intentions are all right, but you're mistaken, you are committing an error of judgment, the worst failing a captain can own; that you are risking the loss of the game through your pig-headed obstinacy. Can you stand up against all that? Can you stand up against the censure of your own men? Oh, I know what meets a perfectly good play if the first time it is tried anything goes wrong." Davenport dropped his hand heavily on the table. "I believe in this play. It's Standham's coup d' état. Will you see it through, captain?"

"I will," Bob answered. "I'll see it through, thick and thin."

CHAPTER III

FOOTBALL PRACTICE

THE boys were as good as their word. Nearly everybody at Standham pitched into football that autumn with vigor born of a single-minded determination to beat Conway. Those who couldn't do anything else yelled, whenever occasion offered, and occasion seemed to need little urging to present itself often. As Shorty remarked, "There's nothing like noise. It comes handy whether you win or lose; it spurs a chap to victory and bolsters him up after defeat. Other things being equal, I tell you a lot of fellows can yell out a beat if they only yell hard enough and long enough. Let the boys know how you feel about 'em and don't wait till the day of the game, either. It stands to reason a team will work better if it knows all through the season it's got the whole school behind it."

There was no mistaking the sentiments of Standham Academy. A wave of football en-

thusiasm swept over the campus, glorifying substitutes and regular players alike. Bob Farrar was the great man of the hour and a train of junes and ju-mids[1] dogged his footsteps, basked in his smile and fed for days on his least word. Such hero worship amused Bob and he met it with good-natured tolerance. But when Scrap Hayes, after tearing through the regulars one afternoon for a thirty-yard gain for the second eleven, the next morning found himself respectfully solicited for the privilege of carrying his books to chapel, there came an explosion.

"I told the fellow," Scrap stormed, "that when I got so weak I couldn't tote a few books around this campus I'd go home. And what do you think the little tyke did? He grinned. Yes, sir, grinned and acted meeker 'n' Moses in the bulrushes. I tell you, it made me mad, the little door-mat! So I said if he ever did anything like that again I'd punch his head for him, 'n' if he knew anybody who was meditatin' doin' it he'd do 'em a favor to tell 'em what they'd get. I'd seen a bunch o' the young idiots whisperin' an'

[1] Boys of the two lower classes, Juniors and Junior-Middlers.

makin' eyes at me in the post-office 'n' I had suspicions by that time. But did that faze him? Not a bit of it." Scrap choked over his rage. "'Thank you,' says he. Honest, just that, 'Thank you.' His voice was kinder sweet like a girl's, 'n' his saucer eyes looked straight at me. My mouth dropped open—oh, you needn't grin. There wasn't any funny business about it. When things come to a point where a fellow can't walk on this campus ——"

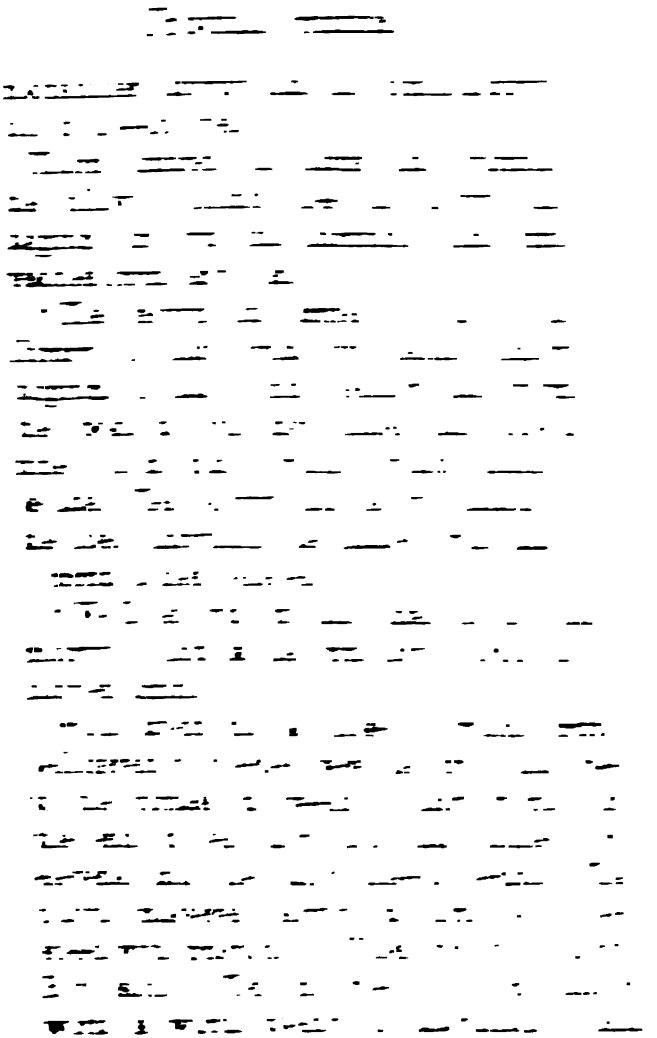
"What'd you do?" clamored half a dozen voices.

"Do? When I'd got my mouth shut,—I bolted. What else was there to do, I'd like to know? The fellow was that squshy, if I'd licked him I s'pose he'd have thanked me. Ugh!"

"Get Bob to give you lessons," suggested Thorn. "I saw him handing out favors this morning."

"No!" The mixture of disbelief and dismay in Scrap's voice was comical.

Bob dexterously shied a pillow at Thorn's head. "When you want to pummel somebody, take Clay," he advised. "He's an old



always he sent his players for a run and a shower before they were ready to leave the field. "Oh, I say, we're not tired," more than one boy protested. But Bob was inexorable. Davenport, running over for a day, smiled comprehendingly.

"You don't think I ought to give them their heads?" Bob asked anxiously.

"No. Keep a tight rein. They'll go all the faster in the end for being held back a bit."

"That's my theory, but some of those fellows think I'm making the mistake of my life. 'You don't get out all there is in us, Bob,' they say. I tell 'em I don't want to—in practice. The other day we had a heart to heart talk about it and I told 'em if a fellow ever went off the field feeling played out, to come to me at once. When a chap began to work up to his limit there was something wrong about training. After going stale myself last year, sometimes I wonder if I'm too careful."

"Better an undertrained than an overtrained eleven," the coach had answered. "There's ginger in the first. And after all,

any surer or faster snapping-back done by prep-school boys than that exhibition you and Thorn gave us this afternoon."

Thorn had indeed justified the Crowd's confidence in his abilities, and onlookers during the early days of practice swiftly noised throughout the school the rise of a new football star above Standham's horizon. Nothing ruffled Clayton Thorn. To a cool head and a steady temper he added physical weight and strength, capping these desirable qualities with unending alertness. Center on the second eleven complained that he never could tell what Thorn was going to do; for he never came at him twice alike.

Hunt was another who, as Bob put it, had "come up to the scratch." He was playing tackle every day now on the first team. Even Tom Thompson, trudging down to the field on the opening afternoon of practice, had passed a far different hour from that of a year before. "I'm going to try for the scrub, Bob," he emerged from under the shower to confide to the captain.

"Go ahead, Tom," Bob had said. "You're good for it."

Good for it he had proved, so good that only his lack of weight kept him from a chance at the second eleven. The small figure was wiry and its legs held a spring that many longer ones lacked.

"Tom goes at the game just as he sets about learning geometry," chuckled Shorty. Tom had found another boy about his size to practice with, and the two were absorbed in snapping the ball at one side of the field. "It takes brains to play football."

"I wish he could lend Ferguson a few for the season," Bob replied, intent on watching the big guard charge through the second's line. "Ferguson can play football pretty well, but he doesn't use the part of his head that he studies with, or, if he does, it exhausts the supply of gray matter. Take your positions and go through that again," raising his voice. "Hit it up, Ferg. They tell me he's mighty shaky in his class work. Fell down flat on the quiz yesterday; and he's the best guard we've got."

"That looks bad."

"Well, rather. But don't say anything. Scrap's trying to coach him. Just began

Saturday. Says his head is thicker than a ten foot wall when it comes to math. There, that went better. But Ferg's had enough for to-day. You can't play these heavy chaps too long at first. I must get in again. Watch Peters, will you, and tell me what you think of him. Time for your sprint, Ferg."

The captain signaled little Tom, who came up on the run. "Get in at the second's end, will you, Tom? Fulton, play Ferguson's position. Scrap, take Fulton's. Now then, all ready!"

Fast, snappy play followed. Bob pushed his players hard when he played them. After ten minutes he led off in the run that ended practice. Tom fell into line with a heart thumping more from excitement than weariness. He had stood up against the first's left end and had counted for something. Peters had told him so. "You're a good 'un," the end had said, "if you are little. Shouldn't wonder if you could play football some day, if you keep on."

In the gymnasium tongues ran briskly while towels flew.

"I'm thinking Conway will be feeling

"Say, Bob," called another, "I hear Fuller's joined the squad. They say he's likely to make the first eleven before the end of the season."

"That so?" Bob's tone was cool and even.

"When I was in Eastville yesterday," began Tom Thompson, "I met a boy I know at home who goes to Conway. He's a first-rate kind of a boy, and I don't see how he can do it—go there, I mean. He was just coming back from the game." Tom paused and contemplated a button.

Shorty leaned over and patted Tom's shoulder. "Was it as bad as that? Oh, I know 'em of old. You can't tell Shorty anything new about Conway."

"What'd he do, stamp on you, or just take a walk-over?" Hunt inquired.

"It wasn't anything he did, and I don't know that it was so much what he said either as the way he said it. He seemed so sure, and—and so superior—I'd always liked him before. He said he supposed we were getting ready over here to try and make a stand 'ainst their team."

"You allowed him to think that we had a notion of doing something like that, I suppose," Shorty interpolated.

"No." Tom was struggling into his coat. He stopped and faced the boys. "I didn't. I wasn't cool and polite and your kind of thing at all, Shorty. I was just angry. I told him if Conway thought it was going to get anything easy in the game with Standham it would wake up mistaken, that was all. That we were going to finish the job we began last year—he didn't like that—and that we'd got the best team and the best captain in the state, or out of the state, for all I knew to the contrary, and if he was going to talk big he'd better talk fast, for he wouldn't get a chance by and by."

"You young fire-eater!" cried Denslow. "What happened next?"

"Another fellow came up, older and bigger, and Ted told him what I said and laughed, and he laughed, too. And he said, 'So Standham means to beat us, does it? Just remember, youngster, that two can play at that game. We're not going to give you so much as a tie this year.'"

"Give!" Scrap sputtered. "Give is good! As if they could help themselves."

"Just the same, it's true that they are working like dogs," chimed in the boy who had spoken first. "I've heard that their captain said he'd beat a victory out of Standham or something would break."

"They'll do just anything to whip us," put in another voice.

The boys swept up-stairs and out of the gymnasium into the warm October air. On the walk Heicher, swinging along toward the post-office, joined them.

"I suppose it's no use asking any of you fellows to give the 'Standard' a lift," he said. "I've got to raise another article somewhere. We're one short."

"Nothing doing here, Hy, unless Thorn wants to turn you out a few pages."

"No, you don't, Bob," Thorn protested. "I'm as good at matching words as a cow at playing marbles."

Shorty woke up out of a brown study and blinked through his glasses at the editor. "What's that, Hy? Want some-ng? I know your man. Name's Bolton,

lives in Horton, third floor [illegible] you."

"Does he really do good work, Shorty?"

But Shorty would commit himself further. "Go and see," he said, and then swung back to the strength of the arguments determinations of Conway [illegible]

"I gave the team a good write-up in the 'Standard,'" said Shorty, "and must back to-day."

"Gone, has it?" asked [illegible] bad. Tom here could have [illegible] paragraph. Maybe you [illegible]

Thereupon Tom had to explain [illegible] with Conway's representatives.

"Just the same," [illegible] Shorty as they passed into the [illegible] when the tale was told. "I think Farrar is not so far wrong about the captain. Tom Farrar can have anything in reason of mine at school, all right."

"He can have anything in reason of his squad, too," said Shorty.

CHAPTER IV

THE MERITS OF THE GAME

THE Crowd burst out of the chapel a day or two later and, careless of nine o'clock recitations, descended as one man on Shorty's room. That youth, who had no class the first hour on Fridays, was deliberately brushing his hair and chaffing the luckless Ned, due in five minutes at "Lit.," and at the moment frantically pulling on his shoes, when the noise of their coming made itself heard. The next instant study and bedroom swarmed with boys.

"Why weren't you at chapel, Shorty?" they demanded.

"Say, you missed it!"

"Oh, my, see the comin' Motley combin' his curlin' locks!"

"Congrats, old man!"

"You're a sly one, partner, to let the prin spring a thing like this on a chap!"

"Why not tip us a wink? We didn't behave pretty—for church."

"How'd you ever ——"

Shorty eyed Spud's open mouth and went on brushing his hair. "Much obliged, I'm sure," he drawled. "It all sounds very fine. But when you fellows get ready to say what you're talking about, I'll take a little more intelligent interest in this conversation."

"Oh, come off, Shorty. We know you're a cool 'un, but you don't come the innocent ignorant act over us like that."

"All right." Shorty's tone was honey-sweet. "Have it any way you like. I suppose I can find out anything I need to know from the prin. He seems mixed up in the business somehow."

"Tell a fellow, won't you?" cried Ned. "I'm due at 'Lit.' in a minute. Here you, Hunt, get off my coat! I just had it pressed yesterday."

"Why weren't you two in chapel?" reiterated Scrap. "Time of your life to be there, Shorty."

"Why?" Shorty mimicked. "Why? Where are your blinkers, Scrap? Neddie and

Shorty slept over, that's why. Neddie won't get any breakfast, either. Shorty will go down presently and see the cook. Nice cook. The cook likes Shorty."

"You mean that you two honestly didn't know you ought to have gone to chapel this morning?" Bob sounded incredulous.

"Always ought to go to chapel," said Shorty virtuously.

"Oh, cut it out now!" cried the boys. "Quit bluffing!"

"I'm not bluffing." Ned chopped his words crisply. Snatching a comb, he dragged it twice through his thick short hair. "What was doing, anyhow?"

"They don't know!" Spud squeaked. "They—don't—know!"

"Ever hear of some papers due at the end of last year in Mr. Blunt's American history?" Bob asked. "Mr. Wetherell reported on them to the whole school this morning."

Shorty looked interested, but inspection of his recollections yielded nothing to the point. "You've got me there, B. F. Blunt was always giving out papers—little hobby o' his. In-

convenient when a fellow had many other things to do."

The boys groaned. "What you givin' us?" they demanded.

"Ever hear of a fellow named Hobart Forbes?" Bob pursued.

Shorty's face took on a melancholy cast. "Dad uses those terms on occasions at home," he confessed. "They—they're not pleasant moments. Shorty forgets about 'em as quick as he can."

"Like his history papers," Bob supplemented, "that the prin talks of in chapel."

Again the room resounded with many voices.

"It was the best of the lot, and Belcher's came next."

"The prin said you did the Boston tea-party up brown."

"Said it was remarkable work for a boy of your age, able 'n' accurate 'n' unprejudiced 'n'—oh, a whole string o' dictionary words."

Shorty looked anxious. "Don't, Spud. They'll hurt you. If one of those should get stuck now ——"

"You showed unusual grasp of the colonial situation," Breck said.

"And a sympathetic but judicial appreciation of the principles involved," went on Denslow. "I laid that little remark up in my mind most particularly."

"Runnin' in a reference to Patrick Henry and what was doin' in Virginia helped pile up your score," Scrap shouted.

"The prin said that it showed you had thought as well as read," piped Spud again.

"He tossed out such a lot of bouquets it kept us busy catching 'em." Thorn clapped Shorty on the back. "Now don't you wish you'd been on hand to land 'em yourself? Look here, Hensley, if you don't care to meet the class coming out, it's up to you to trot along with me. I'll take your books."

Knotting his necktie as he went, Ned disappeared with Thorn, both on the run. Scrap and Denslow followed hotly. "Maybe we won't catch a tongue-lickin'!" panted Scrap.

"I wouldn't have missed it for more than will be coming to us," Denslow answered.

Scrap agreed.

[illegible]

pull off a bluff. I'd forgotten all about that history business. Honest, I had."

"When I think," Bob murmured, "how we've batted about together all the summer and fall and never guessed what a shining light we were hobnobbing with ——"

Shorty threw out an arm, and catching Bob around the neck, raced him toward the stairs. "Don't think, B. F. 'Tain't healthy. Let's go see the cook."

Lightly as he pretended to take the honor, Shorty was secretly surprised and decidedly pleased by the comments won by his paper. Thanks to the half sportive efforts of the Crowd he had learned last year to work harder than he had ever thought he should see fit to work on subjects that did not at once catch his fancy; but history he had always liked. This interest, reinforced by his newly-acquired industry, had gone to the making of the paper. And Shorty acknowledged that winning papers felt good. It was pleasant to have Mr. Wetherell and Mr. Blunt shake his hand and say cheerful words in hearty voices. Shorty had always known that he possessed brains. d taken him until senior year to discover

quite how worth while it was to use them in every-day class work.

Heicher, on his way to "Lit.," hurried to overtake the football manager. "Hold on, Mr. Boston Tea-Party," he called. Shorty halted and Heicher came up. "Bully for you!" said the editor generously. "Give us that paper for the 'Standard,' won't you?"

"Didn't Bolton pan out well?"

"Oh, Bolton—I want the Tea while it's fresh. See? Bolton will keep a month. How'd you know about his things, anyway?"

"Things—his things," echoed Shorty. "That's shop, I suppose. Fresh from the ink-pot. So Bolton drives a quill, does he? Prose or poetry?"

"Both, though he wouldn't show me anything but prose. He gave me a little skit and he's going to send home for a story. Dialect. It sounds first-rate from his description. If that turns out well, we'll have it in the January number. What makes you ask?"

"Thought I'd like to know."

"But you sent me to him."

Shorty acknowledged the truth of this statement.

Heicher stared a minute. "Forbes," he said at last, "you're the most consummate bluffer I know."

Shorty crooked an elbow on the editor's shoulder. "Hy, that's too long a word. Honest, it is. You mustn't let your job get you into bad habits. Find some little word, now, simple and easy to say."

"Great, big, slick, smooth, fine, daisy, dandy," rattled Heicher. "Take your choice. Is corking too long?"

Shorty beamed. "Not a bit. It isn't the longness so much as the oddness that queers a word. Now I'll tell you something, Hy. When I sent you to Bolton that wasn't a bluff. That was mathematics, two and two, you know; mathematics and imagination. Big thing, imagination. Billy Shakspere thought so, too. Read his remarks about it? Shorty studied his lesson for to-day. Ta-ta, see you after class."

Shorty settled into his chair, pulled its broad arm around in front of him and inwardly patted himself for the accuracy of his guesswork. So Bolton liked to "match 's," as Thorn would say. It seemed he

did it fairly well. Heicher thought so. And it was Heicher's business to think right about such things. Shorty decided to look Bolton up again soon; he liked to see how people were put together, and unless looks were misleading Bolton's mechanism seemed rather different from the rest.

The football manager owned to good spirits as he ran up-stairs that night at Horton. He had just pulled his last doubtful game into line and now the autumn's program was entirely mapped out. Standham had dropped one or two schools from its playing list and had taken on more desirable ones in their places. Moreover, a new idea was working in Shorty's head, and he always enjoyed experimenting with new ideas.

Bolton was glad to see him. He too had decided since chapel that the acquaintance begun on the car coming up showed unexpected possibilities. He would not have suspected in the tall shock-headed football manager an ability to write history papers commented upon in chapel as showing "unusual grasp and a sympathetic but judicial appreciation."

"You're open to congratulations, I hear," he said. "That must be a fine paper."

"A fellow ought not to hail from Boston for nothing," Shorty returned modestly. "I've been over the ground, you know. Why, one night I took Paul Revere's ride. I'd traced out the roads beforehand and started at midnight. There's some fun in studying history on the spot. Heard how I slept through the show this morning?" He described the arrival of the Crowd with a dry gusto that gave each point its due.

Bolton's eyes twinkled during the recital. "That was one on you. I have a notion you'll get to chapel on time after this."

"What's the good of shutting the barn door when the horse has run away? There'll be no more prize papers for H. Forbes this year. Heicher was here last night, he tells me."

"Yes, he said you sent him for 'copy.' What made you think I kept such stuff about me?"

"Didn't I tell you to look out for a wizard?" Shorty in his tour of the room brought up the bookcase. These were better stocked

than most student shelves. "You've made Heicher your friend for life," he threw over his shoulder. "Going to the game to-morrow?"

"Why, I think not. What's the use?"

Shorty wheeled and met the quizzical eyes. "To show your interest in the school."

Bolton indicated a chair, and Shorty noticed he was still standing. "Sit down, won't you? I had a notion I might show interest in the school some other way. I'm not keen on football, Mr. Merlin."

"What's wrong with football?"

"Nothing, for the fellows who like it. I don't, that's all."

"Ever played?"

Bolton shook his head.

"Ever been to a game?"

"Not very lately."

Shorty regarded the other critically. "Athletics wouldn't hurt you. You'd broaden out a good bit and toughen."

"I've got a racquet to keep me limber, and as for the rest, I seem to get along very well as I am. Now it's my turn to catechize. What does it amount to, all this practice,

for instance, that the football squad is putting in this fall?"

"The first thing it amounts to is training." Shorty could be serious when he chose. "Learning to work together. Discipline."

"For twice eleven fellows, yes."

"More belong to the squad. And then there's baseball and basket-ball, hockey, running, all the track and field events. Different boys go in for different stunts."

"But why not run and jump and pitch just for fun? Why make a business of it? Outdoors is all right, but what's the good of these organized sports? That's what I mean."

"You play tennis and you write. What's the good of that?"

"I play tennis for fun, once in a while. It isn't very good—what I write."

"I can't dispute you there, Bolton. But this is the way I figure out the business. Every fellow likes to do something and do it well. You prefer to go at it with an ink-bottle. Farrar and his eleven take a football. It's the same thing, only different. The team gets out on a field; you get into the pages of the monthly. While you're having a good

time, you're both doing something for the school. What's wrong with that?"

"Everybody can't play ball. Anybody can write for the monthly."

"Not on your life, they can't! And the boys who don't make the squad can support the team just the same. Hear that?"

A far-away sound of cheering floated through the open window.

"Where else, except on the athletic field, can the whole school get together?" demanded Shorty, leaning forward in his earnestness. "Games, contests with other schools, I mean, bring out the Standhaven spirit. Classes don't matter, a fellow's friends don't matter. It's the academy that we stand for. You take a football game, with Farrar, we'll say, tearing down the field and the boys, jumping to attention, whooping it up like mad, there's where a fellow gets the *feeling of Standhaven* behind him. He doesn't care a red for anything but the school. That's what the team means to him. I tell you it's a pretty good kind of feeling to have. You're missing something, Bolton."

The other looked thoughtful. "I hadn't seen it just that way before. Do all the fellows who go to the games feel like that?"

But Shorty had relapsed into his ordinary manner. "See for yourself. We play Oak Hill here to-morrow. The Hill is generally easy game. That's a pretty fair picture over there. Who is she?"

"My sister."

"A good-looker all right. Drop around some time."

From the hall the visitor stuck his head through the door to deliver a final word. "Say, if you know anybody who is going to the game tell him to learn the yell."

The twinkle came again into Bolton's eyes. "What do you take me for? I learned that out of the first 'Weekly.'"

CHAPTER V

STANDHAM WIPES OUT AN OLD SCORE

Oak Hill, as Shorty had predicted, proved "easy game." And though at this stage in the season team work on both sides was mainly conspicuous for its absence, Standham retired from the field after the first tussle of the year with hopes mounting. Had not Thorn baffled the enemy at every turn? "He kept 'em guessing clear through," was the school's jubilant comment. And had not Bob kicked a goal from the field that won even the visitors' admiration? To be sure, there were everywhere loose ends, but why talk about what would be mended by more time and practice when one could talk about Denslow's tackle and Hunt's run?

Succeeding games added to the academy's confidence in its team. Not that Standham always won. It took its turn at defeat, but it took it without complaint, and steadily, whichever way the score tipped, it watched its team grow strong.

"Farrar knows how to handle 'em," was the verdict.

Something of Bob's own cool quickness passed into his men. The muffs and fumbles of the earlier part of the season became less frequent. As quarter he developed a way of so putting a ball into a player's hands that the least sure could not drop it, and he kept the whole line well to its work. As captain, he had from the start made the squad his own, and though its members often grumbled in private over his decisions and now and then remonstrated openly, they knew that he had the good of the team at heart, and generally yielded in the end to his opinion as completely as they helped to forward his will.

"You can't get mad at Farrar," one of them said to Bolton, "he's so awful honest. Why, if he laid you off the squad you'd have to like him and say he was doing it for the school. He'd see it that way and he'd make you see it so, too."

"He might make a mistake some time," objected the listener. "What would you do then?"

'Bob Farrar hasn't made any mistakes."

"Don't get so hot about it. Who said he had? I'm only supposing."

"Save your breath for something likely. Our captain's all right."

"Oh, I'll subscribe to that. But I'd like to see what you fellows would do if you and Farrar shouldn't agree some day!"

The other seemed to think the suggestion not worth considering, for he turned into Stone with a careless, "No danger." Bolton pursued his way to Horton and put the whole evening into Greek. He usually left until Saturday his Monday's Greek, but he had told Shorty Forbes an hour before that he would help swell the Standham delegation in attendance the next day at the game with the Derry High School.

"We want every fellow who can manage it to go over and help support the team," Shorty had said. "The High whipped us badly last year."

And Bolton had answered, "You can count me in. I mean to give this football business fair trial, Forbes."

So it had come about that Dave Bolton made one of the boys who poured into the train at

Eastville and poured out again, a lusty lunged crew, at the Derry station.

"Rickety brax coax coax
Hickety hax coax coax
Standham! Standham!
What's the matter with Standham?"

barked through the town's streets and on to the high school field. Just how much Shorty's theory of noise had to do with what followed is beyond the purpose of this chronicle to inquire. But ask any Standhamite who saw the game and he will tell you how Bob sent his men smashing through or around the High's line over and over again. The High fought stubbornly. "But they didn't know what was doing," cries the story-teller. "They couldn't see. Thorn would have the ball and he'd snap it back to Farrar and the next thing the High'd know Peters would shoot down the field with Bob blocking the only man in the way, or Denslow would ram their line—didn't make any dif to him who was in the way. And they'd catch on to what was doing just about the time it was done. The pass was that quick, you! Maybe they weren't fussed at first.

But they soon got over it, and then—well, we got our money's worth that day, all right. There'd be center, swapping jokes with the next man and taking what was coming to him as if he'd been handed out a bunch o' roses, and the captain with the grin on his face that won't rub off. I've seen teams try to wipe it away. Winning or losing, they can't smooth out Farrar's grin. It's Standham's mascot. You've heard about that quarter-back run he made? No? Not when he carried the ball clear down the field through their whole bunch and planted it over the line for a touch-down? Maybe we didn't yell!"

At this point the story-teller launched out into detail. "Nobody guessed anything big was coming. Farrar took his place just as usual, sidewise, left foot back, the whole field in sight without having to shift. That's the way he always stands. He took the snap back and turned for the pass. It sounds slow maybe—that's just what it wasn't. Instead of making the pass, with the ball tucked under his arm he was through the line like a streak. The High's captain thought an end run was coming again and had spread out his

men to meet it. But an end run wasn't on Farrar's program just then. Little mistake of the other fellow's. He paid for it, too.

"There wasn't much but a procession after that. Farrar scudded along, the field tailing him as pretty as you please. Center tackled one fellow who might have mixed things up a bit and Denslow took care of another. It looked jolly good—to us. After that, Frink couldn't miss the goal. That play won us the game. Farrar wanted so many points, and he took steps to get 'em. That's Farrar's way. We thought it was Standham's turn after the way Derry High mauled our eleven last year. It wiped out a lot of unpleasant thoughts we'd had about that other game, to whip the High like this. Our score wasn't so awful much to the good, but we bested 'em at every play and we went home feeling fine as silk."

Told from the High's standpoint the story differs largely in the matter of running comment, but the facts are the same. Undoubtedly, it was a good game for Standham and the visitors were to be excused for whooping hilariously when they went home.

"I've got another thing to say," Shorty declared, signaling the conductor with his handful of tickets, after they had changed cars at the junction and the game had been threshed out all over again by word of mouth. "And that is, if Standham means to put up a pretty appearance before Conway in about a month from now we ought to have new suits."

Sudden silence fell on the end of the car where the manager sat. "There's something in that," Jack admitted.

"Conway had new suits last year," continued Shorty. "The High got theirs a week ago, their manager was telling me."

"Our team did look sort o' shabby beside 'em," Spud said.

"But they didn't beat us," asserted Tom. "And that's the main point, isn't it?"

Scrap banged on the arm of his seat. "Hear! Hear!"

"That's so, too, Tom," Ned Hensley acknowledged, "only—those Conway chaps always shoot off their mouths so much you do like to have everything all right."

"We must give 'em as little target practice as possible, Ned means," grinned Breck.

"Got the money in sight, Shorty?" Bob asked.

Shorty tossed the question to Jack. "How about it, Mr. President?"

"The treasury of the athletic association isn't what you'd call spilling over."

"We might go through the school and take up a collection," proposed Spud.

Shorty spread his fingers suggestively wide. "You can't buy much on an I–O–U. That's all anybody'll be collecting from me till December. Fact."

Ned seconded his roommate's statement. "Think up something else, Spud."

Shorty continued with a mournful countenance, "I'd not be here, kind friends, if it wasn't for me job." The conductor came up and he handed over his fistful of tickets. "Pass all this bunch except him and him and him. They travel on their own. Some of those chaps down front are on these. They let it be known?"

The conductor smiled. "They did."

"Don't bother about suits," Bob said. "Ours are all right. They look as though we were used to them. Anybody know how Conway's game went to-day?"

A boy sauntering down the aisle caught the captain's words. "The usual way," he said. "I telephoned from the junction. They won, 18 to 4. Didn't have much to stand up against 'em in Oak Hill."

"The way those fellows rake in the games makes me tired!" Scrap sounded vindictive. "I'd like to see 'em lick dust in front of Oak Hill some day."

"You won't, not just yet," Shorty returned. "So clear up, Scrap. Look pleasant for the fellows, can't you?"

"An odd thing happened to me this morning," said Bolton. "Talking of other schools made me remember it. I pulled a letter out of my box, saw the envelope was pretty well covered, but tore it open without thinking much about that. But the more I read the more the thing stumped me. Finally I made out it couldn't be meant for me at all. Then I turned back and studied the envelope. It had traveled around a good deal and had collected about all the directions it could carry. The first line of the address was plain enough. 'D. F. Button,' I made it out. But the u might have been an o, not closed at the

top, and written by somebody always in a hurry, and of course the first t might have been intended for l. That's the explanation of how it came to me, I suppose. The next two lines carried a blot that left only 'Academy' clear at the end of the second, and all but 'ham' on the third. The rest was plain enough. It was a regular post-office puzzle. The authorities had done their best to make it out. The envelope was marked all over, as I said, with stampings and directions. Finally somebody had scrawled, 'Try Standham' in one corner, and it turned up in my box."

"That's funny!" Spud was all curiosity. "There isn't a fellow named Button in school."

"Maybe he's a june," Hunt suggested.

"Or somebody entering high," Scrap added.

But Spud was positive. "I read the list of new boys just last night in the 'Weekly,' and that name wasn't on it."

"Button, Button," chanted Shorty. "Who's got the Button?"

"Maybe he's not Standham at all!" said Breck.

Bolton agreed. "He might be anything that ends in ham."

"Ham—ham——" The boys puckered their foreheads in deep thought. "We don't know any ham except Standham."

"Give it up," said Hensley. "What are you going to do with the letter, Bolton? You say you opened it."

"When I thought it was meant for me, yes."

"Look here," Bob's voice held the ring of an idea, "there's a fellow on the Conway team named Button. He's their full-back."

"But Conway doesn't end in ham, Bob——" Spud began.

"That's it!" shouted Shorty and Jack in one breath. "That's it!"

"I'd like to know how," said Scrap. "You fellows are getting too cute for the rest of us."

"Why," Jack explained, "the academy is in Old Conway, you know, and Old Conway is just over the town line from Warburnham. There was a chap last year who told me a lot of his mail came directed to Warburnham."

Bolton's eyes lighted. "Warburnham?

That fits. D. F. Button, Conway Academy, Warburnham. Much obliged to you, Farrar. Now when I take it back to the office I can supply the address."

"So Conway's got the Button," Shorty mused. "And it plays football."

"It's pretty much the whole show in their back field, I hear," said Bob.

"Eastville! Eastville!" shouted the brakeman.

"Going next time?" Shorty fired the question at Bolton as they pushed down the aisle.

"I'm thinking of it."

Bob intercepted the twinkling look that accompanied the answer. What did it mean? he wondered. The fact that Shorty was concerned guaranteed that it meant something.

But the Standham trolley was reported waiting and everybody dashed for the street. The players and their friends tumbled aboard, in due season to tumble off into the arms of the rest of the school, who hoisted the eleven to stout shoulders and bore them triumphantly around the campus in a blaze of red fire.

Returning later that night from other jollifications, captain and manager met at the door of Stone Hall, and curiosity stirred Bob to question.

"What are you up to with Dave Bolton?" he asked as they took the stairs on the jump.

Shorty stopped on the landing. "Quit looking at me in that tone of voice, B. F."

"What is it?" Bob persisted. "I heard you asking him about going to the next game. Oh, it wasn't anything said that started me thinking; just the way you two looked."

The manager ran an arm through the captain's and started on up-stairs. "I'm conductin' a little experiment in education, Bobby," he said mysteriously. "Not mine, though I stand to find out a few things myself maybe, but Bolton's. Bolton doesn't like athletics. Bolton doesn't know 'em. There you have the ground for this experiment, as the prin would say. See?"

Bob laughed. "Do you mean to get him out on the gridiron, Shorty?"

"I mean to find out if it's in him to act as though he was on a gridiron—a red-hot gridiron, too."

"How's that?"

"You didn't see him at the Oak Hill game, being otherwise occupied just then. The fellow yelled. I suppose he called it yelling. He opened his mouth and made sounds while it was open, when the rest made 'em. He did it again to-day. And he stood still all the time. Sometimes he clapped his hands, like this." Shorty illustrated. "I watched him and I know. He kept cool, acted like an interested iceberg. Didn't cut loose once, not once. Bobby, my son," Shorty twisted a finger in the top buttonhole of the captain's coat and swung himself around facing Bob, "as sure as you're captain of this eleven and I am its manager, I'm counting on the day when Dave Bolton gets so excited at a football game that he won't know whether he's standing on his head or his heels."

"May I be there to see!" said Bob.

Shorty gave him a shove which sent him stumbling up the third flight. "Oh, you'll be there all right, Bobby," he called.

CHAPTER VI

ENTER THE MAGICIAN

Shorty was giving an exhibition to a select audience that had collected in Bob's and Jack's room. The selection had been wholly a matter of chance, it being after nine in the evening and the study at 20 Stone, a favorite place of rendezvous. The performer had begun by finding something in his mouth which, on extraction, to his apparent bewilderment proved to be a shiny white ball.

"Where under the sun did it come from?" he demanded of the room at large. "Can you cough up a thing like that?" turning to Scrap.

Scrap averred with a grin that he could not. Shorty told him a fellow never could tell till he tried and he'd be willing to wager his best lost golf ball that Scrap had something of the sort concealed about him. Scrap promptly denied the charge. Whereupon, the ball having been handled by everybody and found

to be hard as well as shiny, Shorty with much gulping and swallowing absorbed it again, only to pull it triumphantly a minute later from Scrap's pocket. The mystified Scrap at once took an inventory of the pocket, which, as nearly as he could remember, had contained only a jackknife, a handkerchief, three pencils, a ten cent piece and several coppers, a watchman's whistle, two very soiled golf balls, and some string. All these were found intact.

With this find as a basis Shorty proceeded to multiply balls in uncanny fashion, displaying them between his fingers until his hand was full.

Sadly he gazed at the four balls. "That's a good deal of porcelain to put into a fellow's tum-tum all at once. To help out I guess I'll make number one eat the other three." He picked up a pencil from the study table and tapped the fourth ball gently. "Avaunt, ball!" he ordered, "make yourself scarce! Skidoo!"

Then he waved the four slowly back and forth in closed hands, twisting from side to side and shaking them gently. When he opened his hands there were but three.

"Now when did he do that?" demanded Denslow. "I could see the rest of you——"

"Don't ask me," said Bob. "That's a very little trick. Of course I know he popped 'em out of the way somehow, but as for seeing that fourth ball go up his sleeve or into his pocket, I wasn't quick enough."

"Eats 'em alive! Eats 'em alive! Just 'em alive!" Shorty was chanting his own hands moving again. "Watch the magician rounders. I can feel 'em getting over. Another, going, going—gone." He opened his fingers to disclose two balls.

A minute later there remained but one. Shorty addressed this ball severely. "You! Ate up your brothers, did you? I'll eat you. Go back where you came from and stay there!"

He lifted his hands to his mouth gulped once or twice, choked a little patted his stomach, dropped back into one of the leather chairs and closed his eyes. "All gone!" he announced at last, with great solemnity. "Absorbed into Shorty's system."

The room applauded vigorously. "More! More!"

to Shorty's hands as though his life depended on seeing every motion. Thorn broke the little silence of admiration that had settled on the room.

"Bully for you, partner! I never saw that trick done any better. Can you go ahead and finish it up as well as you've begun?"

Shorty drew his face into solemn lines. "Who is he that questions what Merlin, the wizard of wizards, can do?" he queried sepulchrally.

"Is there more?" Spud gasped. "Oh, Shorty, hurry and go on!"

"All I've got to say is," said Thorn, "that if you can back up these tricks with some more as good, the next time I get busted I shall apply for a job as your manager, and we'll start a traveling vaudeville show."

A bang at the door heralded the advent of Heicher and Blair. "What's doing?" they demanded. "We heard such an uncanny lot of noise even for this room that we stopped in."

"Shorty's doing a trick," Hunt informed them.

"It's magic," Spud cried. "Just drop down

into a wad and tossed over to Jack "with Merlin's thanks."

"That's great," declared the new arrivals. "Wish we'd come earlier."

"I'll paragraph it in the 'Weekly,'" Blair said. "Merlin Second, the Young Magician. How's that?"

"Look here," Scrap interposed. "Why don't we have a show, like Clay says? Get other chaps to do stunts, too. Not just now, of course, but some time after Thanksgiving——"

"Thanksgiving nothing!" thundered Shorty. "We'll have it now, next week—the sooner the better. Rehearsals begin to-morrow. Jack, go ask the prin in the morning what date he can give us. Some of you fellows ought to get to work on the posters straight away."

"What's your hurry?" Heicher asked.

"Hold up a bit, partner," protested Thorn. "I haven't any time to burn these days. And I'm the wizard's manager."

"Get an understudy. The football squad doesn't come into this deal."

"Oh, I say——"

"We want what fun is going."

"Representatives of the squad, get busy!"

"Put him out! Put him out!"

Shorty regarded the boys calmly. "Don't any of you little chaps know what this show is going to be for?"

"Fun, I'm thinkin'," Scrap hazarded.

"There's where you're dead wrong. This show is no joke, I tell you. It's business—money's the object, Scrap, money—dollars and cents, mostly dollars, of course. And that money we're proposing to invest in ——" Shorty looked hopefully from face to face. "Well, you are slow!"

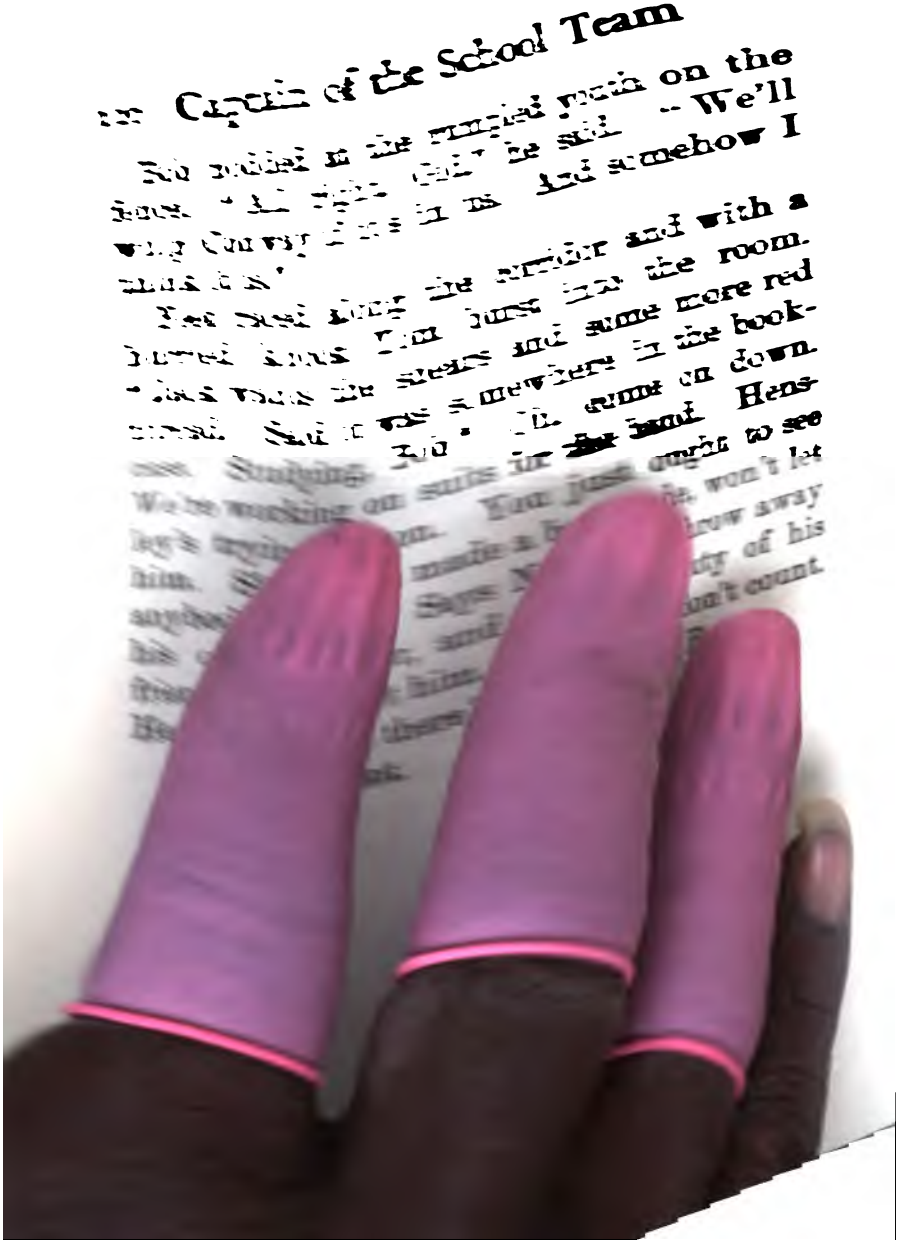
"New suits for the football team," Bolton remarked quietly.

"How'd you guess?" Spud asked when the hubbub had subsided a bit.

"It wasn't very hard—after Saturday."

"That's what comes of being an English shark, Spud," Shorty explained. "You get practice in catching on. First touch-down made by Dave Bolton. Bully for Bolton! Now let's lay out the program."

"We want the academy orchestra, don't we?" asked Blair. "My roommate's in it. I'll get him to talk to the fellows. He's com-



"What's Janus?" Scrap asked Hunt.

"Old Roman codger that could look two ways at once."

"How?" Interestedly Scrap pursued the subject.

"Because he had two faces, silly. Anybody'd know you for a math fiend. Janus was a god."

"Oh." Scrap dismissed the subject and returned to the talk waxing hot about the young magician.

"I'll work up some new tricks," Shorty was saying. "There's one corker I've pretty near got down fine, and I'll get Tommy T. for an assistant. Black him up, you know. Professor What's-His-Name, Young Magician, successor to Merlin and Company, assisted by his faithful Sambo, will appear at Standham Academy in an extraordinary exhibition of the wonders of wizardry. Oh, I can fill up three-quarters of an hour all right."

"I've heard there's a funny stunt going in Horton," said Breck. "Want me to look it up? Two fellows do the talky-talk act together."

"You know there's a ju-mid down-stairs

who can tumble like a clown," Bob put in. "Don't forget him."

"How much are we going to soak 'em for all this?" asked Scrap.

"Oh, soak 'em for fair. The boys will shell out when they know what it's for."

"No, you don't, Blair. That's not good business. You'll get more at a quarter for entrance, with pop-corn balls and candy and a few catch-alls like that inside, than by putting up the first price."

"Listen to the ex-manager of the news-stand at the Mountain Lake House," laughed Bob. "He's your business man of experience."

"What's your idea about candy, Thorn? We can't make any here."

"That's right, Ned, but there's nothing against making an arrangement with some store in Eastville to let us have a supply at cost. Then we return what we don't use and keep the profits."

"Why not have a hand-organ and let some boy dress up and run it?" Bolton suggested. "We might rent one for a night and there's nothing like a hand-organ to catch pennies."

"And a monkey!" Spud's eyes were popping.

Shorty pulled himself out of his chair. "I'll bet he's going to order those suits to-night, this little chap must be 'moneyin' along!'"

"Before we get our money?"

"Sure." Shorty surveyed the untenanted room. "What's this show for? We're going to get it, aren't we? And Bob would be just used to the suits."

CHAPTER VII

PROPOSITION XLIII

THE nine-fifty division in senior-middle geometry came hurrying into the class room and dropped into the seats on the very stroke of the bell. That was a way the nine-fifty division had, and the instructor did not like it. Imperceptibly his face hardened. The nine-fifty division had told him more than once, in answer to his questions, that the nine o'clock class which most of them attended always ran overtime. And when a fellow recites the hour previous at the other end of the campus in a class that lets out two or three minutes after the closing bell, and he has to sprint at his best racing speed to make his next recitation, he is not to be blamed if he drops breathlessly into his seat without a second to spare.

The boys, indeed, were inclined to congratulate themselves on getting there at all, but the instructor failed to view the matter in that light. He was a young man, whose name, by

the way, was Black, and he was very mathematical by nature. He could not help it; he was born so, Shorty assured the Crowd. It always took two minutes for the class to recover its breath and make ready actually to begin the labor of recitation. The instructor had timed them by his watch on so many occasions that he no longer felt it worth while. Two multiplied by thirty-one and that result by five, gives the exact number of hours Mr. Black found that the class lost in a week. But since there were days on which one or more boys were absent, the problem presented possibilities of variety in which averages figured complicatedly. The loss troubled Mr. Black more than it did the class. They called him "cranky." He did not mean it, but the invariable lateness of the class affected him as a cold breeze blowing through a broken window would have affected another man. It irritated him.

That there seemed to be nothing to do about it did not make matters better. He had spoken to the teacher of the previous class more than once, and that conscientious but absent-minded gentleman had apologized con-

tritely for making the boys late and promised hereafter to let them out on the stroke of the bell. But that was all the good it did. For when he got into class again the absent-minded one forgot all about Mr. Black and his geometry and all about bells in the pursuit of his beloved history. The result was that history was very popular at Standham and that Mr. Black in spite of himself looked with disfavor on his nine-fifty division in geometry.

"Anson.

"Arnold.

"Bates.

"Brown ——"

The names snapped out briskly.

"Ferguson.

"Fulton ——"

On the list ran.

"Thompson!"

"Present."

"Anson, Bates, Fulton, Morey, Pope, Smith, Thompson, go to the blackboard."

Ferguson drew a breath of relief. That had been a narrow escape. He watched Fulton walk to the board. Fulton was smart, he thought. It must be nice to go through a reci-

tation without feeling your heart jump up in your throat every time the teacher looked your way. And the worst thing about Mr. Black was that when he jumped you never could tell where he was going to land. Some teachers began with the A B C's one day and worked back from Z Y X on the next, and all the fellows in the middle had to do was to wonder whether the time would hold out to include them. Or if they jumped, they did it after some kind of rule that a fellow could follow and calculate on. One would call on every other boy, for instance, or on every third one. But there was no rhyme or reason to Mr. Black's method, and the worst of it was he got everybody on to his feet so often.

Meanwhile, Mr. Black was giving out propositions and corollaries to the boys at the blackboard. Anson and Bates had the review assigned to them, and Fulton and Morey took the corollaries. Pope came in for the advance lesson, proposition forty-three, while Smith and Tom Thompson went to work on the new originals. Ferguson watched them, painfully groping in his mind for what he had once thought he knew on the subject.

The recitation flowed on smoothly and the little crease in Mr. Black's forehead began to smooth out. That was a sign to the accustomed eyes of his class that the work was going well. If nothing occurred to roil things, Tom might safely undertake after the hour to ask Mr. Black if he would care to try a game of tennis that afternoon with "a fellow who plays awfully well." For the young mathematics instructor was a famous hand at tennis, and Bolton was eager to try conclusions with him. Bolton did not recite to Mr. Black, and Tom had offered to act as go-between.

Anson ran glibly through the solution of his proposition and the instructor's searching questions found him ready with his answers. Mr. Black nodded approval and put Bates on the rack. He responded less fluently, but showed a solid understanding of the main points of the demonstration that plainly pleased his instructor. Fulton made an equally good showing, but Morey, as the boys put it, "was chased all around the block."

Mr. Black had a way of leading a boy on from mistake to mistake until the demon-

strator brought up in a corner where it was plain even to his befuddled eyes that he was wrong. From there he was forced to extricate himself, step by step. Sometimes the instructor let the class try to drive a boy from a position which was actually right, withholding his own verdict or appearing to side with the majority. The boy who stuck to his statements and defended his position against all corners was grounded in independent thinking in a way that stood him in good stead all his life, but not all could stand such heroic treatment. Morey now went down under it and the demonstration passed to another.

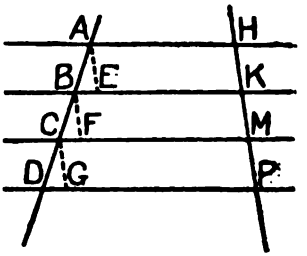
Pope rose to the new theorem, clear-headed and eager. Mr. Black glanced at his figure, called for criticisms which were not forthcoming, and asked a question or two.

"Begin the demonstration!"

"'If three or more parallels intercept equal parts on any transversal, they intercept equal parts on every transversal.' Let the parallels AH, BK, CM, DP intercept equal parts HK, KM, MP on the transversal HP. Draw another transversal AD. The theorem

will be proved if I can show that AB, BC, and CD are equal."

Ferguson stared at the figure; four lines running parallel, two cutting across them in different directions, and three short dotted lines, like this:



Ferguson's mind slowly followed Pope's rapid words. Yes, that was plain so far.

"From A, B, and C," proceeded Pope, "draw AE, BF, and CG, parallel to HP. Then AE equals HK, BF equals KM, and CG equals MP, because ——"

"Why?" interrupted Mr. Black. "Ferguson, tell us why and go on with the demonstration."

Ferguson felt as though some one had dealt him a stunning blow. His head grew light and empty and he clutched feverishly after

those ideas he had thought were there a minute ago. Mr. Black had never done such a thing as this before; stop a student in full recitation and call up another to finish for him! Slowly Ferguson got to his feet and stumbled down the aisle. Pope handed him the pointer and took his seat.

"AE equals HK, BF equals KM, and CG equals MP," said Ferguson, "because——"

He stopped. "Because——"

Why on earth did they equal each other anyhow? Of course they did; a fellow could see it plain enough. But why? What was the geometry's fiddling old reason?

Ferguson searched the empty chambers of his brain at first quietly—it would come to him in a minute; he knew why, well enough—then hurriedly. They were all waiting. Why couldn't he think?

"AE equals HK, BF equals KM, CG equals MP——" he repeated.

"So you have mentioned already," remarked Mr. Black. "Why?"

Ferguson thrust his free hand into his pocket and stared at the board. The white lines ran meaninglessly across its dark surface.

how to show that they were equal he didn
know. The big guard sat down discourag
and disgraced, and the teacher called up
the next boy rather sharply to go on fro
where Pope had left the demonstration.

Ferguson listened to his rapid explanatio
with uncomprehending ears, his mind catch
ing at familiar phrases but missing their ap
plication. Then the bell rang and the nine
fifty division made an orderly rush for the
door.

Ferguson walked out soberly, a kind of
anguish sadness in his eyes. He wished he
were not so stupid. Why had he fallen down
on that one theorem? Before class he
had been sure he knew it. He did know it
[illegible] had to tell it. And then—
[illegible] and muddled and
[illegible]

ing one minute and [illegible] Ferguson knew that [illegible] edge very easily. He could [illegible] it stick.

"Never mind, old man," a hand [illegible] on his shoulder. "[illegible] next [illegible]"

"That was a new problem, you know," put another voice. "If he'd tried [illegible] now ——"

His friends sought to [illegible] "It's his only chance," they said to each other. "Make him think it wasn't so bad. When he's discouraged, he's down and out."

Ferguson took their words in the spirit in which they were proffered, but his brain thought its own thoughts. In some respects Ferguson was not very slow.

That after[illegible] Scrap we[illegible] over the proposi[illegible] on. At [illegible] the les- [illegible] up wi[illegible] of hope [illegible] neil ta[illegible] gure on [illegible] though I'd g[illegible] he said. "Tho[illegible] they're paralle[illegible] ose to

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The instructor turned to the class.

"Parallels comprehended between parallels are equal," prompted Pope.

That was it, thought Ferguson, as he caught the word parallel. Pope had drawn those lines parallel; so they looked even. He remembered it hopefully and raised the pointer from the floor. Now what came next? He had got those lines parallel and that made 'em, yes, it made 'em equal. An ominous silence settled on the class. Ferguson continued to stare at the board. What came next? What on earth did he want with 'em now they were equal?

Mr. Black's voice penetrated his bewilderment.

"Well, Ferguson, they're equal. What does that prove to you?"

Ferguson didn't know.

"What is the relation between AH, BK, CM, and DP by the terms of your theorem?" pursued the instructor.

Ferguson consulted his memory carefully. What was the relation?

"How did Pope draw them?"

"Straight," said Ferguson.

"How in relation to each other?"

Ferguson studied the lines. "The same distance apart," he hazarded.

"What is true then of HK, KM, and MP?"

"They're equal."

"Then what is true of AE, BF, and CG?"

Ferguson looked at the dotted lines and caught at the last word that had escaped his lips.

"They're equal, I suppose."

"I suppose so, too," said Mr. Black. "What next?"

But Ferguson could not tell. He had to make a new start and there both memory and ingenuity entirely failed him. In vain Mr. Black asked him what he wanted to prove and tried to draw from the big fellow's lips some hint of what he would have to do to prove it. The instructor even went to the unusual length of saying, "If you could prove those three triangles, made by your dotted lines, equal, how would it affect your lines AB, BC, and CD?"

Ferguson thought they might turn out to be equal, too—really everything in this problem seemed to have contracted that habit—but

how to show that they were equal he didn't know. The big guard sat down discouraged and disgraced, and the teacher called upon the next boy rather sharply to go on from where Pope had left the demonstration.

Ferguson listened to his rapid explanation with uncomprehending ears, his mind catching at familiar phrases but missing their application. Then the bell rang and the nine-fifty division made an orderly rush for the door.

Ferguson walked out soberly, a kind of doggish sadness in his eyes. He wished he were not so stupid. Why had he fallen down so flat on that theorem? Before class he had been sure he knew it. He did know a thing until he had to tell it. And then—why, then he felt queer and muddled and without an idea in his head. He had asked Scrap to explain this state of things and Scrap had told him he mustn't let himself be "fussed" so easily.

Ferguson didn't think he was "fussed."

"Fussed," he argued, was a fellow's condition when he knew a thing but couldn't tell it. And that was quite different from know-

ing a thing one minute and forgetting it the next. Ferguson knew that he mislaid his knowledge very easily. He couldn't seem to make it stick.

"Never mind, old man," a hand descended heartily on his shoulder, "better luck next time."

"That was a new problem, you know," put in another voice. "If he'd tried you on the review now ——"

His friends sought to hearten the guard. "It's his only chance," they said to each other. "Make him think it wasn't so bad. When Ferg's discouraged, he's down and out."

Ferguson took their words in the spirit in which they were proffered, but his brain thought its own thoughts. In some respects Ferguson was not very slow.

That afternoon Scrap went all over the proposition with him. At the end of the lesson the guard looked up with a gleam of hope in his face. His pencil tapped the figure on the paper before him. "It seems as though I'd got the chap by heart now," he said. "Those dotted lines are equal, because they're parallels between parallels. And those two

sets of angles are equal, and all that makes the three triangles equal ——"

"Why?" interjected Scrap.

"Because they've each got a side and two adjacent angles respectively equal to a side and two adjacent angles of the others. Therefore, AB equals BC equals CD. Homologous sides of equal triangles. Q. E. D."

"You've got it," said Scrap.

Ferguson's almost jaunty air with which he had flourished the Q. E. D. dropped away from him. "Will I keep it, Scrap?"

A pathetic, hopeful eagerness sounded in his voice.

"Of course you'll keep it," Scrap assured him. "Think of the football team, Ferg. You can keep a set of signals in your head, can't you? When Bob shouts out the combination you do what it calls for. That's what italics at the top of a geometry page are—the signal for the proposition. The drawing of the figure 'n' the steps of the proof come along just as straight from the statement o' the theorem as a play on the gridiron follows from the signal."

"I wish it did for me," groaned Ferguson.

"You're smart, Scrap, and throwing off a few propositions don't faze you a little bit. But the two things aren't a bit the same to me."

"You'll be all right," said Scrap. "Keep a stiff upper lip 'n' keep goin'."

"Oh, I'll keep goin'," growled Ferguson.

That night in Shorty's room, the Crowd required a report from Ferguson's tutor.

"Blackie used him all up in class this morning, Tom says," Jack averred. "Better get onto your job, Scrap. We can't afford to lose Ferg."

"Who's talkin' about losin' Ferg?" Spud demanded. "Better not have a little tale like that goin' around the school."

Shorty lifted his head from the floor where he was stretched at full length, "so as to get plenty of room," as he had informed his friends. "No spies here, are there? Half the school don't know Ferg's shaky—he picked up last term, you know—and the half that have begun to catch on are so scared lest it should be true they don't dare breathe, much less mention it above a whisper. When they're talking about football, that is. Oh, I tell you, a fellow could live here and hear a

lot of us talk and never guess a chap's studies had anything to do with his play."

"All that was explained at the first athletic association meeting," Jack objected.

"Oh, we all know it, I guess," said Shorty. "What I mean, Jackstraws, is that we don't talk it. See?"

Scrap reverted to the charge against his tutoring. "You can't expect a fellow to do everything all at once. Ferg did first-rate this afternoon."

"Glad to hear it," said Hensley. "He bumped himself badly enough this morning, according to the story."

"Blackie's a fierce one, anyway," declared Hunt. "If Ferg only had Hartley now ——"

"Blackie has Hartley beat a mile when it comes to teachin' math, let me tell you!" cried Scrap, alert for the good name of his favorite instructor.

"Oh, that's all right when a fellow's onto all the curves like you, Scrap," Hunt rejoined. "But a stupid stands a better chance with Hartley than Black."

"He stands a better chance of not showing out all the ignorance there is in him," put in

Denslow. "But as for knowing more in the end ——"

"Why not let a fellow keep a little of his ignorance to himself?" interrupted Shorty. "I say, these profs want us to give up too much. When it comes to trying to make a chap shell out his all ——"

"Did you ever do it?" Jack demanded.

"I've tried not," drawled Shorty. "I've tried to practice a decent concealment. Besides, it hurts their feelings so when they find you don't know it all."

"Some of 'em like it," Spud objected.

"Not the right kind." Shorty was positive. "The right kind feel bad when you flunk and they can't seem to help showing it and that makes you feel bad too. You wouldn't mind so much for yourself. A little ignorance don't hurt a fellow, but it hurts his teacher. Fact, but queer. Lots of things are queer."

Shorty stared at the ceiling and Spud took occasion to try the experiment of firing a penny at his open mouth. It missed the mouth and disquiet ensued.

After this interlude they all set to work again on posters for the show.

CHAPTER VIII

SCRAP'S PUPIL

SCRAP flung down his books on the table in Bob's study and dropping to the arm of one of the big chairs planted his elbows on the pile, scowling fiercely.

"It's no use, Bob. I can't do it."

The captain returned his level gaze across a litter of note-books, tennis balls and papers. On top of the disorder sprawled a metropolitan sheet, depicting the winning run of a late varsity game.

"You're talking about Ferg, I suppose."

Scrap's scowl deepened. "How that fellow got to be a senior-middler, I don't know."

"He's been at it three years," Bob prompted. "Everybody knows Ferg is dense, Scrap."

"Dense!" Scrap exploded. "He hasn't the brains of a hyena, Bob. When I began coachin' him I thought the trouble was that he didn't understand. Give him time, said I to myself, give him time, Scrap, 'n' make

things clear, 'n' be patient. He'll catch on. What I'm thinkin' now is he hasn't the stuff in his head to understand with."

"Sure about the patience?" Bob asked. "You're so quick ——"

"To get mad," finished Scrap. "I know I'm peppery, always flaring up 'n' bein' sorry afterward. But I tell you I've hung on to myself with Ferg. You don't know how hard it is to sit tight 'n' look pleasant 'n' hear that fellow maunder through a proposition that I've explained to him twenty-five times already. I grit my teeth 'n' grin 'n' go all over it again 'n' Ferg does it after me 'n' says he guesses he's got the hang of it now. 'N' the next day, only the next day, mind you, he comes to me 'n' that little article he calls his mind is just as clean o' that proposition as if he'd never looked at it. I don't see how he does it, Bob! I don't, honest. 'Tain't natural stupidity. Why, I know lots of stupid fellows 'n' they can't do that. I guess it's what folks call genius."

"What do you do then?" persisted Bob.

"Do? Oh, I think about the eleven 'n' how Ferg's our best guard 'n' we need him to whip

Conway. So I twist out another grin,—it comes awful hard by that time,—'n' begin again. But all the time I'm achin' to whack the old dunderhead over the head with his book. Maybe I don't go down to the field after one o' those coachin' spells 'n' have it out with the dummy!"

"Doesn't he work?"

"Sure, he works. 'N' he's that cut up himself about it, he almost makes you bawl with him. 'Scrap,' says he to me to-day, 'Scrap, can't you get me through? You've got to get me through!' Wet tears stood in his eyes, Bob. Oh, Ferg's doin' all he can, I guess. He says it ain't in him; says he was behind the door when the brains were given out. I'm thinkin' he's right, there."

The two sat in silence, staring at the table.

"Heard Heicher's story?"

Bob shook his head.

"Hy had him in 'Lit.,' you know. Tried to get him ready for the quiz on 'Ivanhoe' yesterday. So far as Hy can find out Ferg took a header. Hy asked the prof about his paper this mornin', told him he was int'rested because he'd been tryin' to knock a few ideas

into Ferg's head. The prof told Hy he wouldn't lay it up against him. 'It was pretty bad then?' asks Hy. But the prof wouldn't commit himself. He just told Hy that Ferg gave him a description of the battle of Agincourt 'n' had a lot to say about that old French what's-his-name,—the king who was keen on star-gazin', don't remember his name—'n' how a fellow saved his own neck one day by forecastin' that the king would die the day after he did or some such lingo. Maybe you know the yarn, I didn't. Hy says there isn't anything in 'Ivanhoe' about Agincourt or that French king, either. Hy was pretty well cut up."

"The prin has warned Ferg once," said Bob. "They'll forbid him to play football unless he picks up in these quizzes."

"Math's his last chance then. That's due Monday mornin'. You can see for yourself how much show he's got. Oh, I'm not givin' up, Bob. I'll stick to my job till Ferg's won through or flunked. Maybe he'll manage to squeeze in with a paper that's just passin'. No fancy marks for him. If he passes he'll do well."

"Not well enough for the team. He's got to do more than pass to bring up his rank."

"Bother that eligibility rule!" growled Scrap. "Ferg couldn't do any worse if it wasn't on the books, and he can't do any better than he can. We need him! I mean, we can't get along without him!"

"You've used your eyes, Scrap. But if we can't have him we'll have to get along without him, that's all. Luckily Conway's in the same boat since that agreement four years ago."

"The faculty put the fellows up to it. I say it's nasty when we come to a pinch like this not to be able to use the man we want. I'll bet Conway isn't so squeamish as they are here."

"The captain hands his list in at the office just the same to see if his men are up to concert pitch."

"The faculty aren't so awful particular over there, anyway." Scrap was insistent.

"What about the fellow who had a condition last fall and was ruled off the team? Conway claimed they would have beaten us if they could have put him in."

"And I'll bet they wished afterward they'd played him! I heard some of 'em talkin' about that after the game, 'n' they said what was a condition anyhow? If a chap didn't tell all the state he'd got one, other teams could be trusted not to get wise, and the office didn't always know everything. Why, there was a sprinter three years ago, they said, conditioned by an easy-goin', absent-minded prof. He'd soak a class for fair in exams and not get around to hand in his marks till months afterward. So the office didn't know anything about this fellow havin' flunked. He broke the tape in the hundred yards, 'n' all the time he was trainin' for the dash he was bein' tutored for his condition exam, too. They thought it was cute, that story, 'n' haw-hawed a lot over it. Then they caught sight o' me—'n' shut up."

"Fellows will tell of a thing like that when they won't do it," said Bob.

"What did they get so quiet about when they saw me?" Scrap plainly thought the question a clincher.

"Couldn't think of anything more to say."

"Huh! You're too sure, Bob Farrar, that

other chaps are as honest as you are. Where's Jack?"

"Down in Ned's room, helping with costumes for the band. Show comes Friday. That's the day of Ferg's math, is it? If he doesn't pull through I'll put Fulton on the first team. Ferg can help practice, anyway."

"Fulton!" Scrap snorted.

"Know anybody better?"

"That's just it, there ain't anybody better. But between him 'n' Ferg——" Scrap ended with a whistle.

"Fulton is picking up. I've been watching him with an eye to this."

"He's too slow."

"That will mend."

"When he ain't slow, he's hot-headed. 'Member the way Ferg put him out of the play once yesterday? Fulton was so keen to break through, Ferg let him do it, 'n' then he had him pocketed."

"That will mend, too. Oh, Fulton's no cracker-jack, I grant you. Be fair to him, though. What do you think of the new play?"

"That jigger we get only in secret practice?

It's queer, Bob. But I guess it's all right. Never saw anything like it myself. If it works at all, why, it works, doesn't it? If not, we stand to lose something. That's the way I size it up."

The door closed on Scrap, and Bob was free to return to his book. Instead, he sat staring at the green blotter under his hand, jabbing it gently with the point of a pencil. If worse came to worst, as it seemed likely to do, and Ferguson was pronounced ineligible, was there, after all, any better man to put in his place than Fulton? Bob's thoughts ran over the squad, summing each player's qualifications swiftly. As Scrap had said, Fulton was slower than the captain liked, and over-anxious; in such a hurry to seize his opportunity that he sometimes snatched at a chance before it had fairly arrived and so lost it. He could muff, too. On the other hand he had the requisite weight and he blocked well. If his judgment was not always of the best quality, it was tantalizingly true that the boys who possessed the right kind of judgment lacked weight.

Bob wished he could shake two or three of

the squad up together and create the illusion of one, as Shorty had done with the balls. For though he had spoken hopefully to Scrap, —Fulton would mend, he had said—Bob knew very well that Fulton could not be made over in the weeks that were left before the Conway game. He had learned much since the opening of the football season, he would learn more, but he would still remain, when all was said and done that could be said and done, the weakest point in the Standham line. Bob knew what happened to weak points. The enemy discovered them and made the most of them.

A grim look settled about the captain's mouth. Fuller was playing on Conway's first eleven. He could almost see Fuller twisting Fulton around his little finger. He couldn't have done that with Ferguson. Fuller was hot-headed, Bob reflected, but his pepperiness was of a different sort. It didn't interfere with his judgment, unless he got very mad indeed. Then he sometimes mislaid his manners. Bob doubted if he could ever be angry enough to play worse than Fulton. Fuller would take stock of his opponent in the first few minutes

of the game and then —— The only hope lay in an aggressive match. If Standham could keep the ball in its own hands most of the time, and Bob could send the hazardous plays through the other wing—it would put hard work on the right guard, of course, but it might be done.

At this point in his cogitations the captain laughed mirthlessly. Keep the ball in Standham's hands? They could try. But let Conway get its fingers on the pigskin, and there would be a hole in Standham's line. Bob knew where the hole would be located, too. "A team is no stronger than its weakest point," he said aloud. Then his brow cleared. What about Thorn? He was a host in himself, and he would have something to say about that hole. Bob felt Standham had a surprise in store for Conway in Clayton Thorn.

He got up and took a turn about the room, stopping at a snap shot of last year's captain. In playing clothes, the ball under his arm, Gid Sloane grinned at him cheerfully from the fence of the athletic field. Bob remembered when Jack had snapped that view. Gid had stopped practice for the afternoon

and was just starting for the gymnasium when somebody had tossed the ball his way, and, flourishing a camera, had called, "Wait a minute!" And there he was, great old Gid, squatting on the top board of the fence with the sun in his face and a squint in his eyes and his hair standing out in all directions. Gid expected him to win. "It's up to you, Farrar." How clearly Bob heard Gid's last word to him, accompanied with the tingling grip that warmed his hand even yet. "It's up to you to better that tie last year."

And he would better it, Ferguson or Fulton notwithstanding. It might be Ferguson. There was still room for hope. And if it wasn't, hadn't he a "specialty" up his sleeve, a new Standham brand of play? Gid was coming to the game. The letter saying so was in Bob's pocket now.

"I hear Conway is sweeping everything before it this fall," ran the letter, "and that it says there will be no let-up for Standham. A Conwayite lives right across the hall and keeps me posted. He's not half bad, apart from his brag. I tell him to wait till the game is played. We all know Conway's bark

is worse than its bite, but I'm thinking they've really got something extra for a team this year. All the more glory to the eleven that beats it. By the way, your friend Fuller seems to be making good all along the line. Queer how you and he keep bumping into each other!

"I must be off to a lecture. A fellow said last night, 'How these academic appointments —that's prexy's word—do cut up a fellow's time!' Give my best to Standham. You'll see me at the game, sure. And then I'm coming back to do a little bragging myself. After the game is over—that's the time for Standham to talk. By the way, I got a chance in yesterday's practice to stand up for five minutes against the varsity. How's that?

"As for you, Farrar, go in and win. From what Davenport tells me I feel pretty sure you can, barring accidents, of course. He was down here last week. Maybe we didn't talk! He says you've got your men well in hand and they're a good lot. What's this about a new play? Davenport can be tight as a clam when he chooses. Told me in confidence you have a stunt in reserve with which to confound Conway. Not another word leaked out. You know how I feel about this game, Bob. I didn't win last year. You must. Here's to victory and to you!

"SLOANE."

Bob nodded at the rumpled youth on the fence. "All right, Gid," he said. "We'll whip Conway if it's in us. And somehow I think it is."

Feet raced along the corridor and with a hurried knock Tom burst into the room. "Jack wants the shears and some more red thread. Said it was somewhere in the bookcase. Studying, Bob? Oh, come on down. We're working on suits for the band. Hensley's trying his on. You just ought to see him. Shorty has made a barricade, won't let anybody else in. Says Ned will throw away his own thunder, and it's the duty of his friends to protect him. But you don't count. Hear 'em down there? Do come, Bob."

And Bob went.

CHAPTER IX

MERLIN AND COMPANY

THROUGH a hole in the curtain Spud surveyed the house.

"Packed!" he chirruped gleefully. "Say, just look at 'em! Hear 'em, too. I can't see an empty seat."

"When you get through with that hole, Spud ——"

Spud relinquished the hole and Hensley bent his taller figure to the accommodations of the slit in the gymnasium curtain. By carefully parting it with two fingers one could see very well and not increase the aperture enough to count.

"Shorty knew what he was doin' when he ordered those suits," was Ned's verdict. "The town's turned out as well as the school. Good stunt of my little roommate's to put a poster in the village P. O."

"I gave a ticket to the man who lent me the drum," pursued Spud, "and he bought

three more of me. My, I'd like some o' that candy!"

Other members of the band applied for a turn at the hole. More pranced about the platform jauntily, poking each other in the ribs and "chortling" afresh over mirthful discoveries in one another's costumes.

"Say, where'd they get these white overalls?"

"Eastville. Hensley tried to rent 'em from a clothing store. The proprietor said 'No' when he found out what was doing with 'em. Wouldn't charge a cent. 'You boys take all you want,' said he. 'They're cheap, painters' suits. Want the coats, too, don't you? Just bring 'em back, that's all I ask.' I was along and heard him." The speaker backed up to another. "Tie this red rag, you. How's a fellow going to get around under his back hair? Haven't you got one? Go find Truman. He's giving 'em out."

"The stripe's coming off my pants," announced another, inspecting his leg. "Truman didn't sew it on tight. Hi yi, Jacky! Take another stitch in my leg here."

"Pin it," Jack ordered. "You'll find a

paper somewhere 'round. Everybody got one of these red strips for ties? The cord of that cap goes under your lip, not below your chin, Blair."

"It won't stay under my lip. Keeps slipping up, and then this pill box on my head slips off." Blair twirled the round red cambric cap with its white rosette, winding the elastic band around his finger.

A hand ruthlessly dragged Spud from renewed application to the slit in the curtain. "Here's the villain! Rattling around in my clothes, are you? Look at the ruffles on his legs! And look at me trying to encase my ample understandings in things a foot too small." Brandishing white overalls in one hand, with the other Heicher marched Spud back to the wings. "Shell out!" he ordered.

"But I found these where I left mine," expostulated the surprised culprit. "I thought they were a little big. Sure they're yours, Hy?"

"What's your definition of a good fit, Spud? I said, Shell out!"

Spud obeyed, and the result satisfied both.

The band continued to caper about the

stage and indulge itself in sly toots which passed under the name of "tuning up," when the tooters were taken to task by the leader. Spud swung his precious drum to position in the midst of much good-natured chaffing. In the corner of the basement Shorty, with the aid of a burnt cork, transformed Tom Thompson into a model Sambo. The ju-mid tumbler pulled his gym clothes from his locker and began to don them. In another corner the two boys from Horton rehearsed the lines of their "stunt."

"It's only nonsense strung together," they explained to Shorty. "When nobody laughs, it's flat. But if the folks will just be good enough to grin, we're made."

"That's the place where you fall up against me," admonished the first boy, resplendent in a freshly pressed gray suit. "Don't forget it again. You needn't knock me over, you know, or tickle my shins with that head-lifter of yours."

The second boy made a feint of passing at the other's neck with the sword swinging from his waist. With the cutlery in his belt, largely faked but none the less effective, and

with the gay hues of his shirt and knee-breeches, he made a sufficiently piratical looking object to satisfy any audience's imagination. "All right. Let's go back to where I say, 'Of course every ship has a watch dog, just as you tell what o'clock it is at sea by looking at a dog watch. See?' And you say, 'Then why didn't you curtail the voyage before you started to retail it to me?'"

Up-stairs the audience munched pop-corn balls and candy and drove bargains with the organ grinder for "just one more." The monkey had not materialized, but as Scrap said, "You didn't seem to miss a monkey when you had Bolton." The boy from Aurora developed a talent for broken English and twisted meanings that kept a crowd about him continually. Now and then impatience broke loose in rounds of applause, and cries of "Shake her up." Ripples of talk ran along the seats.

"Heard about those new suits for the eleven? They came day before yesterday. Farrar asked Forbes if they shouldn't keep 'em clean till after the show. He thought they'd better wait and see how it turned out,

I suppose. And Forbes said, 'No, what's the use?' So the team limbered up in 'em yesterday."

"We'll be paying for them to-night, all right."

"Looks so, don't it? They say Forbes is slick. He's got a handful of tricks that beat the band."

"'Professor Foolemezi,'" reading from one of the posters that hung from the gallery of the running track. "Great name, ain't it? That's Forbes."

"I didn't see the point at first. Catch on?"

"Foolemezi! Why —— Ho, that's all right."

"Here's the prin. He's got a good seat all right. Now we can begin."

"They're not late. We're early, that's all. Here, you chaps, have some candy on me!"

"Last summer I saw a man do some of these magic stunts. He shut a fellow up in a cabinet just his size and then stuck knives into him, stuck 'em into the cabinet, I mean, thick as could be, and all over it, too. And

when they opened the cabinet, there was the chap, all ready to jump out, cheerful as a cricket and not a hole in him!"

"Don't you know how they do it?"

"No, how?"

"I read a give-away of that trick just the other day. The fellow in the cabinet is a contortionist and the knives are sharp, but pretty supple. There are slits made in the sides of the cabinet and numbered. You know the thing revolves and the knives go in every time on the side facing the audience. Well, the contortionist inside can tell just where the next one is coming, and he gets ready for it, twists about, you know, and guides the blade where he wants it to go. He must have to be pretty quick, though!"

"S-s-sh!"

The gymnasium quieted swiftly. The curtain stirred, then lifted to a storm of applause.

"Look at 'em! Look at 'em!"

"Say, but that's cute!"

"Get onto the grins of 'em! They can't keep their faces straight!"

"What's the matter with their clothes?"

"Oo-oo-h!" A long-drawn breath ended

in Babel let loose. Ned Hensley, bowing suavely, had signaled the piano. Leader and musicians wheeled, and launching into the lively strains of Yankee Doodle, presented to the astonished audience what ought, physically speaking, to have been a company of backs. Ned's baton flew, his head wagged, the medals on his shoulder-blades flopped up and down, his red cloth mask retreated from the audience, while his arms stretched out appealingly toward those lines of false faces tilted at all angles above the red cambric ties and rows of white buttons. There were clown faces and hobo faces, faces grotesque and faces simply funny. Some beamed directly at the audience across the footlights, others addressed themselves rakishly toward the ceiling. The music blared spiritedly. The band played with energy and the faces nodded in time with the tune. Boys were on their feet, stamping and shouting, Mr. Wetherell laughed so hard he had to wipe his eyes with his handkerchief, and the village children on the front rows added squeals of merriment to the general hubbub. Of course there had to be an encore, and after that another, to the dismay of

Leader Hensley, who had not anticipated such a drain on his musicians' stock of pieces.

When the last bandman was off the stage and the big drum with Spud attached had been convoyed to a place of safety in the wings, the pirate swaggered his jolly way into view and proceeded with the help of his tidy vis-à-vis to string together such a collection of jokes and puns under the guise of a sailor's yarn that in spite of the fact that part of the audience knew it almost by heart already, the house made them come back and do it all over again. The tumbler tumbled to the gasping admiration of the front rows, and the pride of his classmates.

Then ensued a few minutes of business behind the curtain. Chairs clattered, tables thumped into place, screens flew to the sides of the stage. The wizard's properties appeared surprisingly numerous to the boys behind the scenes. "Say, I'm goin' to see this," Spud announced. The Janus Band, thereupon issuing by a side door, joined the audience. The curtain shivered and slowly began to rise. In an expectant hush the house absorbed the setting of the magic to come, the screens, the two

small tables, the larger one, the few and apparently insignificant objects which they held. The hush was broken by a half-startled round of applause as a tall figure came briskly into sight. Was this Shorty, this inscrutable youth attired in the black and white of immaculate evening dress?

"What's he done to himself?" cried Scrap.

Thorn pounded his knee joyously. "He might have stepped straight off the boards at the Hippodrome. I didn't suppose he could get himself up to look like that. Bully for Shorty!"

"Give me that chap in a good strong light," laughed Bob. "He looks a wizard."

Shorty's shock head had given place to Professor Foolemezi's, smooth and dark and glossy. A little more skilful artifice had resulted in the professor's pale, clever-looking face, which wore Shorty's features. "Ladies and gentlemen," the magician was saying, "I shall hope to show you to-night a few phenomena of that deep and occult art with which, as you know, I have the honor to be somewhat acquainted. And first, since many people claim a magician makes use of mechanical contriv-

ances in the wonders he performs, that you may be assured I have nothing up my sleeve, I will remove my cuffs." Shorty took off the cuffs and placed them on one of the tables. Stepping close to the footlights he pushed up his coat sleeves in frank disclosure. "You see," he continued, "nothing is concealed here." He held out his hands in candid emptiness.

"Sambo!"

From the left entered a small coal-black figure, displaying glittering white teeth and rolling its eyes wildly. "Why, Sambo! What's the matter? Not feeling well to-night?"

Sambo, gesticulating piteously, approached his master. "You've eaten something that disagreed with you, you say? How often must I tell you, Sambo, not to swallow everything you find lying about?"

Inserting his hand dexterously, the magician produced from Sambo's mouth a shiny white ball. "A little thing like that ought to disturb Sambo, oughtn't it?" He flung the words at his audience.

The Crowd knew this part of the program by heart, all but the variations incident to the presence of Sambo, and he proved an unfailing

source of fun. His futile efforts to conduct a show of his own on the side lines, in imitation of the professor,—"You have to know how first, Sambo," Foolemezi flung at him jocosely,—his by-plays of absorbed admiration and surprise kept the floor in gales of laughter. But when after a particularly skilful manipulation of handkerchiefs Professor Foolemezi called for the loan of coins from the audience, the Crowd beheld new sights. Everybody saw and heard him drop them into a tumbler on the table. But how after taking them out just by shaking them in his hands and shaking a hat at arm's length he managed to get the coins into the hat, they did not see. Still more wonderful was it to have a fifty cent piece, which Scrap had himself marked and dropped in a glass, mysteriously appear in a small box wrapped in paper in the very center of a big ball of wool.

"I say, that's uncanny," cried Scrap, inspecting his coin. "It's my fifty all right. But how does the money jump about so when we're all watching?"

"Foolemezi's mighty clever at it," said Thorn.

"He's going to give away a trick now!"

whispered Bob. "Listen and you'll learn, Scrap."

So the exhibition went on through marvels and more marvels of quickness and dexterity. "What's that on your sleeve, Sambo?" Foolemezi would ask, and the next second display a stuffed bird, apparently picked from the black boy's coat. But when the lifting of a cover from a soup-tureen, standing where five minutes before every boy in the hall had seen the professor put down the cover on an identical dish, empty,—and "he hadn't moved it between times, either,"—when the lifting of this cover revealed a very much frightened duck that fluttered out of the tureen and ran quacking from the stage, everybody declared that the crowning wonder had been worked.

"Where'd you get it, Shorty?" Bob demanded when the Janus Band had blared its last piece, sounding suspiciously like the first; and when the audience had departed with reiterations of its being the best show Standham had had in a long time, and who knew Forbes could do tricks like that, and wasn't the duck the greatest ever? "Where'd you get it?"

Shorty, busy returning his hair to its natural color, grinned cheerfully. "The duck knows—and I. Say, Ned, ask the prin if he'll give it a roost in his hen-yard tonight? There's a good fellow."

"And get caught with the goods? You don't fool Neddie that easy, professor."

"Did you steal it?" demanded Spud, frantically pulling at the knot of his necktie.

"Steal it? What do you fellows take this show for? Sambo's no midnight marauder, disturber of the peace of duck roosts, are you, Sambo? That biped was rented, I'd have you know, rented for the occasion at the rate of one entrance ticket. Now will you be good?"

"Now that it's a professional," Tom remarked, scrubbing his hands vigorously, "I should think it would be worth more than when it was just a common private duck. Maybe the woman will want to pay us something when we take it back."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Thorn. "How much am I offered for a duck that has quacked to the footlights?"

Jack's entrance switched talk abruptly from

the advanced value of magic ducks. "Look there!" he commanded, displaying a roll of bills and a box half full of silver and pennies. "Out of this we've got to pay for the candy, that's all."

Shorty ran over the bills swiftly. "Bobby," he announced, "you won't have to feel anybody's got a mortgage on the clothes you're wearing when the team comes up against Conway next month."

CHAPTER X

THE GUARD

Bob, awaiting his turn outside the principal's office, knew quite well for what he had been summoned. Yet the words, when they came, fell on his heart with a dull thud of disappointment. After all, hope had been at work within him.

"I am sorry, Farrar," Mr. Wetherell said. "But I suppose it is my business under the rules to keep you posted when a student falls below playing grade. I should be sorry to have to say it of any member of your eleven, but I am particularly sorry to have to say it of Ferguson. He has been struggling ever since he entered Standham to bring his work to the point where it stood in the earlier weeks of the term. This fall has been the first time since he entered the school when his marks have allowed him to take part in athletic contests. I hoped, and I know that his instructors

hoped, he would be able to hold them there. We have given him the benefit of every doubt to perhaps an unreasonable degree. But Ferguson's is rather a peculiar case, as you know, and we have felt justified. The boy has worked hard. You have some one in mind to take his place on the eleven, I hope."

"Nobody so good. We have been rather counting on Ferg, Mr. Wetherell."

"And you want him for the game with Conway Academy, of course. Well, well, that's too bad. I may say, Farrar, that the faculty discussed letting the case go until Christmas, but Ferguson's showing in the recent quizzes proved too flagrant to be passed over."

Bob shifted his gaze from the paper weight on Mr. Wetherell's desk, at which he had been staring for the last minutes, to the principal's face.

"Didn't Ferg do the best he could, Mr. Wetherell?"

The man's clear, kindly eyes held the boy's steadily. "I think he did, Farrar."

"Then I don't see—it doesn't seem fair, does it, when a fellow is doing his best, when

it isn't anything that he can help, you know, his falling below grade, to cut him out of all the school sports? I thought that rule was made to get hold of the boys who could do better if they'd only try, the chaps who neglect their studies for athletics. Ferg hasn't neglected his. If you could know how he has been boning, Mr. Wetherell ——"

"I do know, Farrar, and I agree with you in one sense that it does not seem quite fair. But here is the rule, agreed on between Standham and other schools. It's not fair to break that, either, is it? The application of that rule works in this case to our disadvantage and to Ferguson's unhappiness. Another time it throws out a promising Conway player, let us say, who has also done his best. Standham would be the first to protest, if Conway claimed that the rule should be suspended in his case."

Bob smiled at the picture the principal's words brought to his mind. "That's so, Mr. Wetherell."

"So long as we have the rule we must abide by it, Farrar. A law that can be broken at the discretion of one of the parties

to it is no true law. It lacks authority and hence fails to command respect. Justice to all the boys involved in the agreement will not let us at the dictates of our feelings now and then disregard it in order that we may deal, as we think, more fairly by one individual. Do you not agree, captain?"

"I suppose I do." The words fell regretfully. "But it's hard on Ferguson."

"It is. Nobody feels that more strongly than I." The principal rose and Bob rose with him. "It's allowable to wish you well, isn't it, in spite of the loss of your best guard? May his successor prove a better man than you think!"

Bob took his way out of the room. He had not told even Jack of his summons to the office, and no one was hanging about ready to pounce on him for news. Slowly he descended the stairs and started across the campus toward Stone. Half-way there he met Thorn.

"Hello!" Clayton exclaimed. "What's up?"

"Do I look like that?"

"You look as though you'd just received a

private wireless from the bureau of coming events to the effect that Standham was booked for a beating."

"Maybe I have."

Thorn's face changed swiftly. "Is it Ferguson?"

Bob nodded. "Ruled off." He recounted the interview in the office. "A precious lot of good those fresh suits will do us if we can't win! I'd rather be dragged in the dust in old clothes than new."

"Same here."

They kicked at the turf on the edge of the path and thought gloomy thoughts.

"Were you going anywhere?" Bob asked at last.

"To the libe. It will keep."

"Come on down and let's practice snapping the ball."

Listlessly at first, but with growing energy, the two handled the ball. As their muscles responded to the call of habit, their interest quickened. What they were doing began to absorb them. Under this absorption, their faces grew less gloomy. Bob stopped to say, "Maybe we've a few chances left," and Thorn

straightened up to remark, "Fulton made the cleanest kind of a tackle yesterday."

Then they worked on, silently. By the time they were ready to go in to the midday meal no one would have recognized them as the melancholy boys who had trudged over this same path half an hour before.

"Anyhow, we've got Davenport's play," said Bob.

It was hard, telling Ferguson, but Bob did it after lunch. The big guard took the news quietly.

"I sort of expected it, Bob," he said. "Scrap and Hy did the best they could. If they'd had anybody but me to work with they'd have pulled him through, I guess. I tell father he ought to put me to work, but he says no, education first. And I'm no good, when it comes to a scrimmage with books. They down me at every tackle. But I did hope I could keep my gain on 'em this fall and stay on the team. You know I tried as hard as I could, captain. You know that, don't you?"

"Sure I do, Ferg. The whole school understands that. There isn't a fellow on the

squad blames you, or in the academy, either. Every team expects its ups and downs. This is one of our downs."

"If we lose to Conway I'd hate to have the fellows think it my fault. But then, as you say, Bob, they all know I haven't any brains. Fulton takes my place, I suppose?"

"I guess he's the only fellow for it, Ferg."

An eager look came into Ferguson's face. "I can put Fulton up to a better game than he's playing now, and I will, too. That's something I can do for Standham, even if I've lost the chance to play for her myself."

"Ferg's all right, if he is stupid," Bob said in telling the story to the boys who gathered about him just before practice that afternoon on the athletic field. "It wasn't his fault we've lost him from the first eleven and he's doing his level best to make it matter just as little to us as he can."

"He's getting into his playing clothes up at the gym now," volunteered one of the listeners.

"I told him he needn't come down to-day," said Bob. "Thought maybe he'd feel too cut

up to want to, you know. But that isn't Ferg. 'Oh, I guess I'll be down!' says he. 'We don't want to lose any time, do we?'"

Scrap whistled. "Say, I wouldn't have taken bouncin' from the team that pretty, would you?" appealing to Hunt.

Hunt shook his head. "Ferg's the stuff! Hello, here he comes. Let's show him how we feel about him."

Thorn bounded to the steps of the grand stand. "Come on, fellows! Rackety brax and a three times three for the loyalest son of Standham!"

The cheer boomed out roundly.

"Ferguson! Ferguson! Ferguson!"

The red mounted in the guard's cheek. "Thankee, boys," he said.

He took his position in the second's line, Fulton changed over to the first eleven, and practice began. From the side lines the onlookers watched the afternoon's work and commented. Their words differed as widely as their dispositions.

"Watch Fulton rattle round in Ferg's shoes! We stand about as much chance with him for right guard ——"

"Oh, I don't know. Thought he was showing up rather better than usual to-day."

"Give the fellow a chance, can't you? Don't queer him before he's had a fair show. You can't tell what he'll do in a game. Maybe there he'll prove Johnny on the spot."

"He didn't when Bob put him in for the last half of the game Saturday, did he? Ferg's the Johnny Standham ought to have in that spot at right guard."

"I'll subscribe to that, but I say, too, give Fulton a fair chance. If you fellows let him see you don't trust him, how much is it goin' to steady the chap?"

"That's so, too. Yi-i, there's a clean tackle for you. Fulton tore a leaf out of Ferg's book that time."

"Let's see him do it again. We don't say Fulton isn't good in spots. The spots don't spread enough, that's all."

"Perhaps they will, when Ferg gets hold of him."

"Huh! You talk as if this was September and Standham had time to burn. Two more games and three weeks from Saturday we're up against Conway."

"Oh, let up on that, blue goggles. You can do a lot in three weeks when you have to. There's no use in supposin' we're beat before we are. I say, let's be cheerful while we've got the chance."

"That's the talk! To hear some of you boys, a fellow'd think the whole team had gone to smash. I guess Farrar'll pull us through."

"Farrar's all right. And there ain't a thing he won't do to win out, either. Anybody heard whether Gid Sloane's coming for the game?"

Somebody supplied the desired information and the talk took a more evenly hopeful turn. It sounded well, though a keen ear might have detected a forced note now and then.

The day was warm and still, one of those hazy days that sometimes slip into early November, when exertion is an effort. Practice lacked its ordinary snap, the plays dragged, self-control showed here and there frayed edges. In vain Bob cajoled his men, in vain Thorn presented to all attacks an impervious rock of good nature. Scrap lost his temper and gave Denslow to understand in no uncer-

tain terms what he thought of him. Whereupon Denslow lost his, a rather rare occurrence, and relations between the two continued strained for the rest of the afternoon.

Bob heroically refrained from gratifying his desire to shake Scrap, which, while it would afford him solid satisfaction, would only complicate matters further, as he well knew, and sent the squad for its run earlier than usual. The boys pounded along doggedly. The weather had joined forces with the disappointment about Ferguson to undo their usual pleasant selves and turn them temporarily into pepper-pots. They jogged back to the gymnasium, hot and dripping, and ready to quarrel over mislaid bath towels and any other small matters that might offer opportunity for altercation. Bob shut his mouth on the words that ached to slip from the end of his tongue and went about his dressing steadily.

By virtue of thus attending strictly to their own business he and Thorn finished before the others and found themselves for a second time that day walking up from the gymnasium together. They proceeded in silence for

the most part. The post-office lured Standhamites at this time of day, and toward the post-office they went. The warm dusk was settling over the campus. Little beads of sweat stood on the boys' foreheads. Their hair dropped damply. It had been hot work dressing.

"Whew!" Bob said once. "Hope this weather doesn't keep up to-morrow."

"Amen!" said Thorn.

They walked on.

"What got into 'em to-day?"

"I don't know. Let's not talk about it."

The usual crowd that watched the distribution of the late afternoon mail had dispersed when they pushed into the post-office lobby. Thorn drew a letter from his box.

"It's from Dyce. Elmhurst postmark." He felt in his pocket for a knife and opened the envelope deliberately. It held a single sheet, written over with blue ink in a clear, dashing hand. Thorn passed the sheet to Bob. "He's coming. You know I wrote last week asking him up to the game."

Bob glanced through the letter. "Maybe you'd better telegraph him to change his mind."

Thorn remembered that Bob had seconded the invitation, but he held his peace. They trudged on toward Stone.

At the door Bob spoke again. "We might wait and see how things go next week."

Later in the evening Scrap sought the study at 29 Stone. It was a mild and gentle Scrap, radiating toleration and good will. Scrap's friends had grown accustomed to seeing him so, and no longer worried over what it meant. He came and perched on a big leather chair and beamed shamefacedly at Bob.

"Denslow and I have made up," he said. "Thought I'd come 'n' tell you, cap'n. The fellows are feelin' sorry about this afternoon. The old Nick got into us, I guess. Me most of all. But somehow,"—Scrap reflected a minute, "somehow I do feel so awful good after I've been bad. You can count on us tomorrow for a bunch of angels, Bob, with double flappers apiece."

CHAPTER XI

IN BOLTON'S ROOM

BOLTON ransacked his mind for a word to rhyme with score. "Door, four, lore, bore, tore, yore, more, shore, soar, roar ——"

He consulted the last carefully. Roar. That showed possibilities. At least it sounded boisterous and noisy. But did it fit the idea he wanted to convey? Obviously not, directly. The idea might be twisted, however. He turned it over and over in his mind. Or he might give up the idea and take a new one, something suggested by roar. Bolton did not like to do this. He rebelled against the notion of ideas tagging after rhymes. Any self-respecting rhymster, he insisted to himself, ought first to get his idea and then catch his rhyme to match. But perhaps in this case, Bolton smiled whimsically, he was not a self-respecting rhymster. Roar—roar. The scribbler abandoned his first thought and started in pursuit of another that he could

make roar. Having captured it, he read over what he had written and went on to the next verse.

So, stopping at intervals, meditating, running over rhymes, taking a turn once in a while about the room, he proceeded down one sheet of foolscap and on to another. There were so many lines crossed out that it did not amount to much, after all. He had tried last week, but in the warm moist weather, and with all the other things he had to do, the words he wanted had stuck in his head, supposing them to be lodged within his anatomy at all. Anyhow, he had not been able to induce them to come out. Ideas were sometimes shy, he reflected. But to-night they seemed quite eager to tumble from the tip of his fountain pen and spread themselves on paper. He worked on. After a while he gathered up the sheets and read over what he had written. Then he read it again, and again. He pushed back his chair and gazed doubtfully at the manuscript, a frown puckering his forehead. The thing covered a good deal of space but as yet it was only four stanzas long, and one of those was chorus;

four stanzas of four lines each. There ought to be another stanza to finish out the scheme. Bolton read it all once more, drew a long breath and pulled his chair nearer to the desk again.

The last came hardest of all. He stopped longer between lines, scratched out words and wrote them in again, drummed forth the meter with his fingers, and finally tore up the sheet and threw the pieces in the waste-basket. That was no good, anyhow. With a clear page staring him in the face he set his teeth and took a firm grip on his reluctant muse. Skittish thing! Did she mean to leave him in the lurch now, just one stanza short? March up and face the music, Muse!

A knock interrupted the industrious scratchings that followed, and Shorty's head came into the room.

"Genius burning?" he asked in a sepulchral whisper.

Bolton nodded, politeness struggling to throw off his grip on the muse.

Shorty's hand waved him back to the chair from which he had half risen, and Shorty's

feet followed his head into the study. "Go on. Don't mind me."

Bolton obeyed; he was by now no stranger to Shorty's ways, and that youth, having disposed his long form over the couch, watched him curiously.

"So that's how it's done," he announced, when at last Bolton laid down his pen. "Throw two sighs, squirm around once like a fly just touching the tangle-foot, claw hair four times, pat the rumpled spots five—and it's a poem. Want me to read it?"

Bolton regarded Shorty for a full minute in silence. "I'm not sure that I do."

"Will it take you long to make up your mind?"

"In the first place, you can't spell it out." Bolton held up the mutilated sheets.

"Copy it then. I'll give you five minutes."

Bolton copied, oddly submissive. His manner gave Shorty an idea. He hugged it hopefully until the pen ceased moving.

"I'll bet I know what it is."

"What?"

"A song for the Conway game."

"It's not good. But you put me up to it, you know. Give me your honest opinion, honor bright?" Bolton held the sheet out of reach of the extended hand.

"Honor bright."

Shorty, flat on his back, with the paper above his head, read the lines through. Then he sat up and read them again.

"The position won't help you any," said Bolton. "I told you it wasn't good."

"It's awful smooth."

"But you can't say it's right." Bolton flung the words at him challengingly.

"It doesn't stir a fellow up," Shorty admitted. "There isn't—I'm giving it to you straight now, Bolton—there isn't much get up and go in it."

Bolton pounced on the word. "That's it, but I couldn't name it. I knew something was wrong. Can you fancy the boys singing it?"

"They'd sing it fast enough. They couldn't pound it into Conway, though. It's too cool. Not enough spirit. You're not quite warmed up to football yet."

The other's twinkle reasserted itself.

"That's the truth, Forbes. This," he tossed the paper on his desk, "went easy enough, but somehow I felt all along it was stuffed with sawdust. Machine made, you know. I didn't really get worked up over it."

"If you had, you'd have thrown two fits maybe and clawed the wall paper! Let me know some time when you feel the real thing coming on. I'd like to see it. But you wouldn't have done this a month ago."

"That's so, I wouldn't."

Bolton considered this view of the matter.

Shorty sauntered over to the window. "Been living up to your character lately?" he flung over his shoulder.

Bolton stared. "What's that?"

"Where have you kept yourself for a week then?"

"Oh, I see. You mean have I been grinding? Well, rather. Two quizzes, and on top of them, a history paper. I handed that in this noon. It's taken every extra minute I've been able to scrape up for a week."

"That's what you get for electing advanced history with the other grinds," interjected Shorty.

"Guess I have rather dropped out of things for a bit," Bolton agreed. "Anything special doing?"

But Shorty was drumming on the glass and he did not hear. From the window he wandered on aimlessly, stopping now and then to stare at a picture on the wall, to turn the pages of a magazine, or to help himself from a bag of nuts on the table. Bolton, deep again in cogitations, after a time awoke to the consciousness that he had never before seen Forbes so restless. He gave over investigating the contents of his mind and transferred his attention to the senior.

"What's wrong?"

Shorty turned. He had been glaring at an innocent looking lake shore fringed with birches and the frown still lingered. "Any objection to a fellow not grinning like a Cheshire cat on your premises?"

"Not a one. Scowl away."

"Thanks." Shorty suited his countenance to the permission. "You're saving my life, Bolton. If I'd looked cheerful another minute I'd have had spontaneous combustion, sure."

"I thought everything always went all right with you, Forbes."

"You did, did you? Thought because I'm a sort of professional joker, I must be made of pink-lined eider-down, maybe?"

Bolton smiled the quiet smile that seemed to light his whole face into humorous understanding. "What's the matter with the football outlook now?"

Shorty's manner changed swiftly. He came and perched on the corner of the table-desk, nursing one knee with his clasped hands. "Say, I'm scared," he confided. "I don't want to look pleasant any more. I want to rest my grin. Can't do it at home, can't do it anywhere but here. Mustn't let Bob or Clay see. Mustn't discourage the team, you know, mustn't discourage the school. Look pleasant—smile! That's the program. Everything's fine and dandy. Going to the dogs, maybe, but fine and dandy just the same. If I scowl here," he waved a comprehensive arm, "why, I know you won't tell."

"All right. Mum's the word. Think Standham is coming up for a beating, do you?"

Shorty shook his head vigorously. "Don't think. Just feel blue. Don't expect to feel blue always."

Bolton laughed. "What's gone wrong?" he asked again.

"Nothing. Everything. Heard a story that disagreed with me, that's all." He swung himself off the desk and relapsed into a chair. "Your friend Button starred in it, Conway's Button. Heap big football man, Button. He dribbled the ball clear down the field in their last game, and fell on it for a touch-down."

Bolton's face failed to light up in comprehension, and suspicion entered the speaker's eyes. "Know what it is to dribble in football?" he demanded.

Bolton confessed ignorance, and Shorty enlightened him. "You dribble when you kick the ball ahead of you till you get time to pick it up. Dribbling isn't common. Lots of fellows don't know it. But I'd say, 'Come on, Button, Fuller and the rest, come on, Conway, and take what Standham's got ready for you,' if we only had Ferguson at right guard," went on the manager, thinking aloud. "Thorn

will play Fulton's position and his own too, of course; he'll have to, and Thorn's a cracker-jack all right, but there's no denying we've been handicapped by losing Ferg."

Bolton looked bewildered. "He's the big fellow, isn't he? Losing him! What do you mean? He played the last game I saw."

"Don't tell me you haven't heard about Ferg!"

"I certainly haven't."

"Didn't you know that he was laid off the first eleven last week?"

Bolton shook his head.

"Well, you have dropped out, sure! Shades of Methuselah! By the way, had you heard that Methuselah was dead, Bolton? How any fellow in this school could keep from hearing about Ferg beats me! Why, the place buzzed like a hornet's nest over it! You've qualified as a grind all right."

"I'm not ashamed of being a grind. But what happened to Ferguson?"

"He couldn't keep up to scratch in his studies, that's what happened."

"Does a fellow have to?"

"Didn't you know that either?"

"I'm learning."

Shorty sat up and recited solemnly, "'A student becomes ineligible to participate in any game or athletic contest between Standham Academy and any of said schools when he ceases to do creditable work in at least half his number of hours and when he is conditioned in any subject, until such time as he shall have removed said condition and brought his work to creditable rank in said number of academic hours.' That's the rule, my son. It goes on to define 'creditable,' according to every school's system of marking. Ferg's got his jersey, but we've lost him at the pinch with Conway. How did you happen to miss hearing that rule? It was read out in the first athletic association meeting of the year."

"Didn't go," said Bolton. "You'll remember I've not been very keen on organized sports."

"That's so. And we're all so used to it by this time that nobody ever talks about the inter-school agreement except when it pinches. You'd have heard talk enough if you'd kept

your ears open last week. Any other little things you ought to know, now that the information bureau's open?"

"Plenty of 'em, I presume," said Bolton. "The trouble is I don't know enough to know what I don't know. See?"

"There's something in that. But this little chap must run along. Ta-ta. Much obliged to you. Shorty feels better for letting off steam. Now where's my grin?" He made a pretense of taking something out of his pocket and fitting it to his face.

Bolton returned to the desk after his visitor had gone and began to collect the papers scattered there. Shrewdly he suspected that few boys in Standham had seen Forbes in quite that mood. It must be a bit tiresome sometimes to run a perpetual merry-go-round. But was Standham going to lose to Conway in the coming game? Bolton had heard enough of the earlier talk among the boys to know quite well how the school felt about that contest. He hoped Standham would win. Victory meant more to him than it would have done a month ago, when he had rather prided himself on the aloofness of his attitude

to organized sports, but still his emotions were rather mild. It would be pleasanter to win than not and it would please the boys tremendously.

His mind ran swiftly over the points of the conversation. Forbes had felt at once what it was that his feeble attempt at a song lacked—spirit. Button's dribbling kick, Ferguson's mishap, scholarship as a factor in football eligibility—these new facts added to his store were to be contemplated and pigeonholed where he could get at them when need rose. Suddenly his hand dropped sharply on the desk. The process of sorting and putting away had brought an old bit of information into strange connection with a new.

He sat for some minutes staring straight ahead of him, thoughts racing through his mind. Then he rose, mechanically swept the papers on the desk into the waste-basket, and reached for his cap.

"I'll find Farrar," he said aloud.

CHAPTER XII

THE LETTER TO BUTTON

"Bob's at signal practice," Jack told him at the door of 29 Stone. "Come in, won't you?"

Behind Jack, Bolton could see other members of the Crowd. Scrap was haranguing them excitedly. The boy did not feel like joining a discussion to-night.

"No, can't stop, thank you. I'll drop around again."

"He's never back much before 'lights-out.'"

"I'll try to see him before chapel to-morrow, then."

Wondering what Bolton wanted of the captain, Jack turned again into the study. Bolton went back down the hall, disappointment in his heart. He had hoped to get the matter off his mind. It occurred to him to tell Shorty, but the room below 29 was dark and no answer came to his perfunctory knock. The manager had not been up-stairs. Of that Bolton was sure. Perhaps it was as well that

he had not found him at home; Farrar was the one to tell.

He came out into the crisp November darkness and started toward Horton. Ought he to speak at all? Had he a right to the discovery made by mistake, as it were, and under cover of a misapprehension? Could he let his tongue know what his eyes had seen? It had been none of his business. He had understood that clearly and had never before dreamed of speaking of a fact so accidentally learned. It had seemed to have no bearing on his interests or on Standham's. Did the discovery of a connection make it any more his business than before? It did not look quite honorable to pass on to another what had never been intended for either of them to know. And yet the finding out had been no fault of his. Knowing what he knew, was it, on the other hand, fair for him to keep still? He debated the matter for an hour after ten.

In the morning he sought the captain of the eleven. Farrar was called the fairest boy in school. He would leave the question of what honor demanded to his decision. Bob was alone in the study, and Bolton came at

once to the point, both of his news and of his doubts.

"Farrar," he said, "I don't know whether I've any right to tell you what I am going to. And there isn't another fellow in school who would have to speak so late as this. You know I'm not very well posted on athletics. Until Forbes told me last night I didn't know that every member of an eleven playing for or against Standham has to be well up in his studies."

"Not every eleven playing against Standham," put in Bob, "just teams from the schools that have signed the joint agreement, Conway, Derry High, Oak Hill, and one or two more."

"By this agreement no player is eligible if he has a condition?"

"That's the way it reads."

"Last month I opened by mistake a letter meant for some one else—D. F. Button at Conway, the boys thought. Remember? You said he was on the Conway team, Farrar, and I've heard of him since, heard things about his play. That letter was from Button's father, reading him a lecture on writing

home after money to pay for a tutor in math. He had never expected to hear of a son of his being conditioned in anything, he said, and he never wanted to hear of it again."

"Conditioned!"

"It didn't mean anything to me then, except that I had by mistake peeked in at another chap's licking. Any other Standhamite would have smelled smoke when you said Button played ball. I didn't until last night."

"Couldn't you have read it wrong, Bolton? When you saw it wasn't meant for you——"

"I'd read it through by then. Oh, the letter wasn't long. And I couldn't have made up the study part or misread it. The fellow that letter was meant for had a condition, and his father didn't like it. That was plain."

"Conway played Derry High last week," Bob was thinking aloud, "and used Button. He was a star, too. It was he who won the game for them. But if he wasn't eligible to play——"

The captain left the sentence in mid air. His face was grave.

"Would it do anything to the score?"

"Reverse the victory, throw the game to Derry High."

"It seems to be a bigger question than I thought," said Bolton.

"It certainly doesn't concern Standham alone. But there's some mistake here, there must be. Why, no school would stand for a thing like that! We don't love Conway much, you must have seen that, Bolton, but we don't paint 'em quite so black. I have it!" Bob's face brightened. "Button has worked off his condition."

"He couldn't, Farrar. I distinctly remember something about tutoring twice a week through the term."

The chapel bell began to ring, clanging sonorously across the silence that had fallen between the two boys.

"It looks bad," Bob spoke soberly. "I've got to think about this. There must be some kind of an explanation. And I'm much obliged to you for telling me; for the way you did it, too. Don't say anything to anybody else, will you?"

Bolton promised readily. He had slipped the load of doubt and conjecture off his own

mind on to another's, and he had no wish to spread the unsavory story. But he found himself feeling oddly belligerent toward Conway. A team that would shoulder a trick like that needed beating. He hoped Standham would teach them that it didn't pay to cheat. What would the captain do? he wondered.

What Bob did was to get Shorty into the study at 29 that night and bar the door to others with a "Busy" sign. After the captain and the manager and the president of the athletic association had talked a while they called in Thorn.

"Clay's got uncommon good sense," said Shorty. "Let's hear how it strikes him."

Thorn came and Bob went over the situation again. "All we have to go on," he ended, "is a letter read by mistake by a member of this school. It may or may not have been intended for Button of Conway Academy. If not, we've nothing to fuss over. If the other thing, there's crookedness chargeable to somebody. I've tried to see this business from all sides. The best I can make out of it is this: If that letter was meant for Conway's Button either he alone or the whole

Conway team is smashing the athletic agreement to smithereens."

"Could he keep the knowledge of his condition from the rest of the team, Bob?" Thorn asked.

"Search me! I'm only supposing cases. Scrap says marks sometimes trickle into the office pretty slowly over there. But Scrap is liable to make mistakes."

"We have been hearing tales all the season," said Jack, "of how bound and determined Conway is to beat us this year. 'They'll do anything to win.' Haven't you fellows heard that over and over again?"

"Talk is cheap, Jack," put in Shorty. "Conway might say the same of Standham, but that wouldn't prove we didn't know where to draw the line."

"Bolton couldn't have made a mistake, Bob?"

"He seemed to think not, Clay. Jack asked that, too."

"Bolton's on the square," Shorty averred. "He doesn't jump to conclusions, either. What he says was in that letter I'm willing to believe was there."

"I don't see," said Thorn, "that we have proof of anything. The only proof, the letter, has slipped out of our hands. If Button is mean enough to pretend to be eligible when he isn't, he's mean enough to say the letter wasn't meant for him at all. And if the team or the school knows, and I don't see how they can help it, and winks at the whole business for the sake of his play, they'll keep on winking."

"I guess the schools that are in the agreement will have something to say about that," cried Jack. "Do you suppose any other team will play with their dirty eleven?"

"What can they prove? Nothing. It takes proof to blacklist a school when it comes to the point. All we've got is a pretty well set up suspicion."

"Then you admit it's likely," cried Jack.

"I admit nothing. From the way I've heard some chaps here talk of Conway, I'd think the fellows over there went around with horns and hoofs on, if I didn't know such little appendages weren't worn these days. It's safe to discount by half most that you hear, I've discovered."

Shorty stretched out his feet on Bob's best embroidered pillow. "When Clay has experienced a little of Conway at first hand he'll line up with the rest of us. Conway certainly can't be called pleasant, but we've never found 'em dishonest. I say, go slow."

"And I say so, too, Shorty," said Jack. "Only since Bob told me this, I can't get the idea out of my head. I'll never feel right about Conway again until I know the real inwardness of the Button business."

"It gets at us pretty close since we lost Ferguson," Shorty acknowledged.

"Anybody know if there's any way to find out at the post-office whether the letter came to rest at Conway?" Jack inquired.

Thorn answered, as the one most deeply versed in postal customs. "They're mighty close-mouthed at Uncle Sam's P. O. It's against the rules to give away addresses. We won't make anything by that tack. Might as well quiz the Sphinx."

"Then I don't quite see how we're going to get anywhere at all."

"Maybe we can't, Jack."

Shorty rapped on the arm of his chair. "I

call for Captain Farrar's opinion. We've done enough talking for one while. Speak up, Bob."

"I'd hate to think," said Bob slowly, "that it was true. I don't know anything that would make me feel worse. I almost believe I'd rather lose the game than have it so, and you know that is putting the matter pretty strong. Conway has always played fair, as Shorty says. Now here comes along an ugly suspicion. It isn't fair to either side to let it go at that. If it isn't so, we're doing Conway a mighty mean turn to think the thing. And I for one have made up my mind not to believe a word of it. How would it do for me to write Conway's captain, tell him what we've heard and how we got at it?"

Shorty whistled. "May I be there to pick up the pieces. Just buckle your head to your shoulders before you read his answer, B. F."

"He'll be mad either way," said Thorn.

"I don't see it so. If Button isn't eligible and the captain doesn't know it, he'll thank me for putting him in a way to find out the facts before any more games. If he is eligi-

ble, I may get a few stings, of course. There are just two ways for us to act, as I see things. One is to write frankly to Conway. The other is ——" Bob hesitated.

"Out with it!"

"Go on, Bob."

"To make up our minds the letter wasn't meant for Button of Conway and forget about it."

"Too late for that," groaned Jack.

"Write your letter, Bobby, my son. We'll wait and read it over."

"You don't suppose there is more than one Button in Conway?" Thorn hazarded.

"Of course!" cried Bob. "That must be it. The letter was meant for another Button. Fellows of the same name often have initials alike, too."

"Year before last," reflected Shorty, "we had four Smiths here at Standham, two of 'em John G's and another Joseph P. The fourth answered to Samuel, so he's outside these calculations. Their mail got most uncommon muddled. John Greenleaf was always getting John Gates' letters and the other way round. Sometimes envelopes addressed

to J. P. Smith were put in a J. G.'s box; I used to see 'em get together after the mail was all distributed and divvy up."

Bob pulled some paper out of the desk drawer. "You're a brick, Clay," he said. "I'll tell Prang our explanation. That ought to smooth him down."

"Don't you count on it, B. F. A fellow who will throw water on a red hot poker must expect to see it sizzle."

Bob's pen ran briskly over the sheet, his face brighter than Jack had seen it since morning. The note, when finished, read candidly. It made a simple statement of the facts, apologized for troubling Captain Prang with them, but explained that since the question of eligibility had been raised the straightforward course seemed to be to write directly to Conway, and ended by suggesting that there was probably some simple explanation of the matter.

"A crocodile couldn't shy at that," Shorty pronounced sentence. "Prang will sizzle only a mite, I guess, after all, not more than he can get over before the game."

"Don't talk of it to the boys," Bob cau-

tioned before the "Busy" sign came down from the door. "This is strictly on the quiet."

"Quiet it is," they agreed.

CHAPTER XIII

"BUTTON'S BUBBLE"

Of course the story leaked out into the school. Such things always do. None of the five who knew the contents of the letter to Button told anybody else; nobody ever does tell, you know. But they discussed it among themselves, when two or three of them chanced to fall into each other's company, discussed it quietly. Shorty always declared that one of these conversations must have been overheard, and perhaps that is as good an explanation as any. The important point is that a rumor began to walk abroad through the academy.

"Have you heard there's somebody on the Conway eleven who isn't eligible?"

"No! How's that?"

"What do you mean? Not eligible?"

"They say he's been playing all fall with a condition."

"What's his name? How'd you hear?"

"Fellow over in Horton told me. He got it from a chap in Stone. I can't tell you which position he plays—the Hortonite didn't know."

"I do. It's Button, their full-back!"

"Whew! Button! He's one of their great lights, ain't he?"

"You bet! Didn't you hear Farrar call him pretty much the whole of their back field?"

"But they're playing him still,—why, that—that's cheating!"

"Of course, it's cheating."

"I say, how did this come out, anyway?"

"Derry High caught on. The High's captain put Farrar wise ——"

"Hayes don't tell the story that way. He says a Standham fellow named Bolton,—Hayes knows him,—got word in a letter that Button had a condition in math. Hayes is mad enough to eat tacks."

Another joins the group. "Heard the latest? Derry High has called a meeting of all the schools that signed the agreement. They're going to put Conway out."

"What about our game with 'em?"

"Farrar's canceled it."

"No such thing! He only told 'em they'd play no game against Standham with Button on the team."

"They say Mr. Wetherell has written Conway's principal. He called it 'a disgrace to the athletic record of the two schools.'"

"Did he, honest?"

"So a fellow just told me."

Thus the rumor grew, gathering to itself both fact and fiction. Before many hours Button had been reported as not even a member of Conway Academy. "Hasn't been near a class since last June, you know. Rents a room in Old Conway and just trots around with the squad, playing games."

Bolton found himself figuring in the school's heated imagination alternately as Button's half-brother and as the David to a Conway Jonathan who had been too honest to countenance deception longer. Why he had taken just this method of making his feeling known, nobody thought to inquire. Every sixth boy had a totally new version of the story and in between ranged all varieties of minor differences.

"Jack," said Bob at last, "there's nothing for it but an athletic association meeting. Get the academy together and face 'em with the facts."

"They'll sound tame enough after what has been going the rounds to-day," Jack answered. "When can we have it? To-night?"

"That's none too soon. What's the rule about meetings?"

"An extra one can be called by the president at any time when ten members demand it in writing."

Bob tore a sheet from the nearest notebook just as Tom Thompson bounded into the room.

"Hello, Tom, get eight fellows in here right away, won't you? Anybody you can find handy."

"Tom says you want us. Just met him on the stairs." Denslow and Hunt appeared in the door before Bob had finished writing his name below the lines he had scribbled at the top of the paper. Hasty feet sounded in the corridor.

Bob extended the pen. "Sign this if you want Jack to call a meeting of the ath-

letic association to put a stop to some of these yarns about Conway."

Denslow scrawled his name under Bob's and passed on the pen. "Shorty's told me the truth. It's dull beside the lurid stuff I've been hearing all day."

Tom signed last. "I guess Jack wants to save his breath by telling everybody at once," he said quaintly.

Meanwhile at the other end of the table Jack had been busily writing a call for the meeting. "Somebody take it up to Center," he suggested. "I'll make a notice to go on the bulletin-board in each house, too."

Denslow tucked the call under his arm. "You needn't worry about a quorum," he threw over his shoulder as he shut the door.

Short as was the warning of the meeting, not a boy failed to hear of it. Even that section of the student body generally referred to under the head of "greasy grinds" turned out almost en masse. Standham's sense of fair play had been outraged, a sense which was the special property of no particular set of boys. The Crowd sat well up toward the front where it could take a hand if event

called for speech or action. Bolton dropped into a rear seat. Jack had asked him to tell the school about his discovery, and he had replied that he thought the president could explain the whole matter quite as well alone. Only he wished Jack would make the school understand that Button was no relative of his masquerading under a changed name, and that he, Bolton, did not know a soul at Conway. Jack promised faithfully to perform this. "Get up and do it yourself if I don't say the right thing," he had added.

Jack talked rather well on his feet, and tonight he swung the facts of the case into line in a clear business-like way that left no haziness in his hearers' minds. "If anybody tells you again that Derry High has done anything except play a game with Conway, or that Mr. Wetherell has taken action, or that Bolton did more than open a letter he had every reason to think was his, don't believe him," Jack ended. "We don't even know for certain that Button's name was on that envelope. The handwriting was anything but plain, as I've said, and 'son' and 'your father' inside didn't tell much. Farrar has written to

Captain Prang, and he looks for an answer any day. Till it comes, when we expect to know more than we know now, we ought to give Conway the benefit of the doubt—it's a sizable doubt, remember."

Shorty started the applause that greeted this tolerant sentiment. Once started, the volume swelled rapidly. It was pleasant to know that virtue did not require canceling of the game with Conway. What Standham wanted was to whip its rivals, not to break off relations with them. Truman's statement had already put an entirely new face on the matter. Boys who an hour before had hotly argued for an immediate boycott of everything bearing the name of Conway Academy decided to wait a bit. Speeches from the floor followed the president's, amicable speeches, voicing the steadily growing sentiment that Standham had been too hasty to think evil. Conway should have fair play.

Last of all the house called for Captain Farrar and cheered his brief sentences to the echo by way of showing its approval of his course of action. The meeting broke up convinced that the boys who had had the manag-

ing of the affair had hitherto done it uncommonly well and had saved Standham from getting into what more than one declared might have been "a nasty mess."

"Just the same," said Jack, as he and Bob opened their books in the study at Stone Hall an hour later, "I'd not trust those fellows not to face about in a jiffy if we don't get the right kind of answer from Conway. They're lambs to-night, but—oh, my!"

"I thought I'd hear from Prang this morning," Bob remarked. "Began to look last night for a Conway postmark, though I didn't really expect it that soon. Shorty's going to stop for the evening mail when he comes from the libe at nine."

Jack flipped the pages of his history with a practiced hand. "There's one comfort. When Prang's letter comes, we'll know. Either Button's eligible or he isn't, and they can't do less than tell us. I hate having to think a thing is one way, and being afraid all the time it's another."

An hour later the Standham dormitories stirred after the concentrated stillness of evening study. The athletic meeting had cut into

the first part of quiet hours. Nine o'clock boomed from the tower on Center Hall and at the stroke books dropped and legs stretched. Congenial spirits betook themselves to each other's rooms to discuss "Button's Bubble," as Heicher dubbed the nine hours' sensation that had so stirred the school.

"You pricked it neatly, Truman," the editor said, casting himself down on the couch in Bob's and Jack's room.

Thereupon Ned Hensley, Scrap and Hunt promptly sat down on him, he "looked so inviting," as Hensley explained some minutes later, when quiet had been restored.

"The next time you feel like trying experiments of that kind, take him out and do it in the hall," Jack ordered, ruefully examining a rent in the satin cover of his second best sofa pillow. "Among you fellows, Bob and I won't have any cushions left."

"When ours get too shabby," said Bob, "we'll exchange 'em for a few of their fresh ones. I've got my eye on a pillow in Hy's room. He'll wake up some day and find it missing."

"Huh," grunted Scrap, busily at work removing the signs of conflict, "Hy's pillows are no good. Shy 'em the least little way, 'n' they bust somewhere or get all mussed. They're too tender. Give me a pillow a chap can use."

"By use, Scrap means turn into a football," Heicher asserted. "I'll leave it to the rest of you if any self-respecting sofa cushion ought to stand being batted by a golf stick out of a window and kicked back in, the way Scrap and Shorty mauled one of mine the other day."

"If you think it's easy to bat a soft squshy pillow out of a window that way——" began Scrap.

"Nobody said anything about its being easy. I say my pillows don't play with your golf-clubs any more, that's all. When you want to try experiments like that, take your own property."

"But I don't live on the first floor. You can't punt a pillow in at a second story window," argued Scrap. "Try it and see."

"Quit jawing," cried Denslow. "Scrap could argue a fence-post deaf, dumb and blind.

You've done enough talking for one day, Scrap."

And Scrap, with a retort on the tip of his tongue, privately reflecting that he had talked a good deal that day, unexpectedly obeyed.

The conversation shifted again to the meeting of the earlier evening, a topic from which it had been forcibly wrested by the intermediate tussle. Having limbered their muscles, the boys were now quite ready to look back calmly on the panic of the last few hours.

"We do go off at half-cock pretty quick," said Hunt, remembering certain remarks he had made under the stress of strong excitement.

And Denslow, reviewing his own record for the day, echoed Hunt's words.

"I feel queer," said Spud, "sort of mixed. Like I'd waked up and wasn't where I thought I'd be."

"Dreams," Heicher chuckled. "Idle dreams, Spud, all about Conway."

Breck balanced a paper-knife skilfully on the tip of his thumb. "I suppose if we had kept cool, like Bob and Shorty and Thorn and Jack, the meeting to-night wouldn't have

knocked the ground out from under us quite as it did."

"You mean what we thought was ground," supplemented Hunt.

Breck accepted the correction and dropped the paper-knife, which Scrap captured.

"Talking of Thorn, when's he coming back?" Heicher asked.

"He ought to have been here on the half-past eight car," said Jack. "But these Boston trains are always late."

"Wish my father'd telegraph me to meet him in the city some day," sighed Spud.

Denslow's mind had been working along the earlier lines of talk, and he spoke now with a question that took no note of the last weeks. "Do you suppose we'd act any differently if we had it to do all over again?"

"'Button's Bubble'? Of course." Scrap was seldom anything but positive. "It's easy enough to keep cool when you know that's the way to be. Now I might have been a perfect cucumber ——"

Derisive shouts interrupted this statement.

"Why weren't you then?"

"Kept the cucumber in the ice-chest, didn't you?"

"I said might have been," Scrap repeated with dignity. "And I could be again, if——"

Shorty's entrance cut Scrap's sentence short. For Shorty waved a letter above his head. He crossed to where Bob sat and the captain sprang up to meet him.

The boys jumped to their feet and crowded around Bob. Thorn, Heicher and Jack sat still.

"Is it from Prang?"

"What does he say, Bob?"

"Hurry up and get into it!"

Bob surveyed them, a gleam of fun in his face. "Where's the cucumber now?" he asked. "I'll open it when you're all ready."

Hensley and Hunt seized Scrap and bore him back to the couch, where they held him down between them. The rest squatted on the floor or perched on the edge of the table. Shorty deposited the too adhesive Spud on Denslow's knees, and returned to Bob's side.

"No fair!" cried Scrap. "No fair looking over Bob's shoulder!"

"Who brought this letter?" asked Shorty.

His eye followed Bob's down the page and through the few lines written inside. It was not a long letter.

"What's Prang say?" chorused the impatient room. "What's he say?"

"Oh, hurry up!"

"Can't you tell a fellow?"

But captain and manager were now rereading, silent, absorbed. Bob's look plainly mirrored his perplexity.

Suddenly Shorty brought his hand down sharply on his knee and a light of understanding broke over his face. "They think we made it up!" he cried. "That's it—they think we made it up!"

CHAPTER XIV

PRANG'S ANSWER

"MADE it up!"

"What else do you get out of this? Oh, Prang doesn't say it in so many words, he's too cute for that. Listen!" Shorty read aloud, still looking over Bob's shoulder. "That's the prettiest mixture of the insulted-innocent, mind-your-own-business-and-we'll-mind-ours, you-haven't-a-leg-to-stand-on sentiments it's ever been my luck to see. Prang's got 'em all in and made it short, too. He tells Bob he doesn't play football with ineligible men and refers him to the interschool agreement in the same breath. Whoop-e-e-e!"

"We can't blame him for feeling warm," said Bob.

"And puttin' it in a freezin' way, oh no." Shorty rubbed his hands together as though they were cold.

"There are two Buttons at Conway," cried Jack.

"Only Button Number Two is a high stand man, which rules him out," Breck supplemented.

"Sarcastic, ain't he?" growled Scrap. "Prang can answer for the full-back and as for the other fellow, everybody at Conway knows his record. To satisfy Farrar, he speaks to the chap's roommate. It's funny how Standham comes to know so much more about Conway grades than the home folks. Interestin' about the missent letter, too—oh yes! Hopes Farrar won't fail to let him know any other little items. That letter makes me tired."

"A good many things make you tired, Scrap." Bob tried to laugh it off. "It's rather rough, but I'd have been some stirred up myself in Prang's place, maybe."

"Huh, you! Not on your life, you wouldn't have written a thing like that, Bob Farrar! You'd have been mighty careful how you let Prang know, even if you did growl a bit on the sly. Can't pull the wool over our eyes that way." And Ned Hensley kicked at a corner of the rug by way of emphasis.

"Just read that last sentence again," said Hunt. "I didn't quite catch on."

"'Don't let anything keep you from passing on further items of news that Standham may in any way acquire.'"

"He thought he was saying something smart." Spud's voice sounded like that of one who, barefoot, has stepped on a hornet.

"'May in any way acquire.'" Breck repeated the words slowly. "Just what does he mean by that?"

"What Shorty says, I reckon," Denslow answered.

"You think he thinks that we manufactured the little tale of the letter just to make trouble?"

"To push Button off the team, Breck, that's the point."

Scrap jumped to his feet. "Have those fellows got the nerve to think we're scared?"

"Nerve!" growled Hunt. "They've got nerve enough to think anything, the gasbags! A fellow could go ballooning easy with one or two of their heads."

"Oh, see here," Bob broke in, "it's no fair to look too close at what a chap says when

he's mad. Prang threw off that letter in a grouch, it's plain as day."

"What stumps me," said Jack, "is that we don't know any more now than we did before. Prang hasn't told us a thing."

"That's so too." Breck's feelings ran over in surprise. "Let's look at the letter again, Bob."

He and Heicher studied it thoughtfully.

"Prang's kept off the point like a born bluffer," Heicher said at last. "It's true. He doesn't make a single definite statement about the full-back Button. Comes out square that there is another Button in school, that's all. The rest is up in the air."

"He might be hedging," Breck agreed.

"And that's as good as saying it's so," cried Spud.

"What's so, Spud?"

"That Button—the football one, I mean—isn't eligible."

"What do you make of the place where Prang says he hasn't any ineligibles on his team?"

Spud's face fell. "I'd forgot that. But if it's all right, why won't he say so, straight out?"

Bob tilted his chair back from the desk. "Don't ask me why Prang writes his letter the way he does. I'm only equal to getting at the sense of his remarks, not the reasons for 'em. It seems to me he's made his meaning pretty clear. Button's eligible. That's the point."

"That isn't the only point we want information on," said Blair. "We want to know about the letter—Prang turns that off with a dash of sarcasm, but it won't go down. We're after facts. Who got that letter?"

The boys rallied to Blair's question. "Yes, who got the letter?"

Shorty whistled two or three notes in answer to a bar from the hallway. "Open the door, Tommy T. Don't you hear the warble of our returning center?"

A chorus of "hellos" greeted Thorn on the threshold. His entrance switched the current of speech to a new channel. For a minute the boys forgot Conway. Dropping his suit case, Thorn shook himself out of his overcoat amid a volley of questions.

"How's Boston? Anything left of it when you came away?"

"What'd you do?"

"Have some good grub?"

"See any shows?"

Thorn met their sallies briskly. "Pretty fair little town. It treated me white, anyhow. I've picked up a new trick for you, partner. Cribbed it from a man in Heath's. Eat? Well, I guess I did—all I could and stay on the team. But I tell you, it breaks up a chap to give the go-by to a lot of old favorites just because he's in training. My advice to you fellows is, wait for your holiday till you can get outside of anything that makes your mouth water. Yes, we did the town. Dad's as good as any boy to knock about with. Just let me tell you where we went last night. Got a mortgage on the whole of that couch, Hy? Oh, never mind, I'll take the table."

Lifting himself to a seat, Thorn rehearsed the tale of his holiday. "Now," he said, as he drew the story to a close, "it's up to you to talk. What's been doing since I left? Heard from Prang?"

Bob tossed him the note. Thorn read it, swinging his foot. As his eye ran down the page, the foot swung more slowly. It stopped altogether.

"That's queer," he said.

"What's queer?" Bob asked. "The letter Bolton got couldn't have been meant for Conway, that's all."

"But it was."

"It was!"

"How'd you know?"

"What do you mean, Thorn?"

"Just this." Thorn looked around on the startled faces. "I was going to write you, Bob, but things got busy in Boston, and I wasn't staying long enough to have it make much difference whether I wrote or not. You know that station where you change cars for Conway? A fellow boarded the train there who had just been visiting at the academy. I gathered that pretty soon from his talk. You see he found another chap on the train that he'd known somewhere or other, and they came over and took two seats together right behind mine. I got everything they said; couldn't help it. First, they threshed out how long it had been since they'd seen each other and what they were doing now. Then they picked up the subject of Conway. Laid that place out pretty flat. Oh, but they agreed

Conway knew how to play football. I heard the whole story of Saturday's game. They didn't let slip any secrets; they weren't on the inside track there. And of course I couldn't have sat by and listened if they'd started in to throw away any tricks. Luckily they stuck to the kind of things everybody could read in the papers if prep school games were reported as the varsity are.

"After a while Conway dropped out of the talk and I began to get interested again in the story I was reading, when all at once I waked up to hear a yarn spinning behind me, about a letter sent from a little town in Florida or Mississippi or somewhere south to a fellow named Tinkham at Tufts College. On the envelope was written 'Tink—Tufts.' Not another word. Uncle Sam did the rest. Some clerk scribbled 'Mass.' under Tufts and when it arrived the postman knew who 'Tink' was and delivered it at his door. Our old uncle's a pretty cute guesser, understands his business.

"'Good story,' says the other fellow, 'but I can match it. At Conway they were telling about a letter Button got one day. That was well traveled all right.'

"Maybe you think I didn't begin to sit up and take notice! 'How about it?' asks the first chap. That set Number Two off. 'The envelope was covered over with directions,' says he. 'And no wonder. All of the address anybody could make out was the name, —Button, you know,—"Academy" for the school, something or other "ham," and the state. The thing had been going some, trying all kinds of schools. Somewhere on its travels, a person had opened it. That made Button mad. He seemed rather sore over the letter anyhow. Nobody could find out why, or what it was about or who it was from, either. The chaps ragged him well, the few who knew. There were only two or three who did know, and the fellow I went up to see was one. They've kept it to themselves so far, but Button's got a hot time coming to him. They bring out a grind book at Conway toward the end of the fall term and these chaps are keeping this letter story up their sleeves till then. I saw the page about Button; Ned had it ready to send down to the printers. It's a scorcher all right. Button won't want any more letters from that girl right away.'"

Thorn laughed at the astonished faces. "Thought I to myself, you've missed your guess on the girl question, but I decided Bolton wouldn't thank me for mixing in the talk, so I kept still. There you have, as nearly as I can remember them, the exact words of that little conversation behind me. Queer how pat they fit in right now."

"Then Button isn't eligible?" cried Spud and Hunt in one breath.

"That doesn't follow," said Thorn. "What I've been telling you just goes to prove that the letter Bolton opened was meant for a Button of Conway. Either Prang doesn't know all he thinks he does or else he's bluffing when he claims to be so mighty ignorant of what Bob's talking about. And after the things that fellow said on the train I guess he really doesn't know."

"What if he doesn't? How's that going to change Button's condition?" Breck asked.

"Yes," cried two or three other voices. "That's what we want to know, too."

"I didn't say it would," said Thorn. "You jumped too far at the start, that's all I meant to remark. Now we know the letter came to

rest at Conway, and we've proved that somebody over there named Button has a condition and wants to keep it dark. Q. E. D."

"And by the process of elimination," Scrap argued, "we can find the Button. One Button's a high grade man, the other's full-back on the eleven. Solving that problem is easy."

The warning bell cut across the talk, and the Hortonites jumped for the door.

"The fact that Prang may not know of the missent letter doesn't prove he's ignorant of Button's having a condition, remember that," warned Blair.

"Thorn's story makes Prang's letter sound pretty thin," Denslow remarked to Heicher as they raced across the campus.

The editor nodded. "What makes me boil is his putting it up to Bob that Standham's manufactured the yarn."

Behind them in Stone Shorty was knocking his roommate's head gently against the wall by way of emphasizing his words. "Neddie," he said, "take warning and always tell the truth. If you don't, most likely you'll get found out. And then what good will fibbing have done you?"

CHAPTER XV

BOB DECIDES

Bob lay staring with wide-open eyes into the darkness of his room. Was Prang bluffing? The boys thought so. Not one, after they heard Thorn's story, had spoken a word in defense of the Conway full-back. They had accepted the situation at its face value. Conway was playing a conditioned man in its back field. Well, what then? The matter couldn't stop here. Standham must protest the full-back. Bob twisted the sheet in his fingers. Practically, he had done that already in his letter to Prang. If he wrote again, wrote more emphatically, it would amount to saying just one thing: "You're not telling the truth." Well, they weren't. Why hesitate to say so? A gust of anger shook Bob. He had fought it off while the boys were here, he had held it down by main force, and had done his best to talk mildly and look at the thing coolly. Wasn't he the captain of the team? But now——

Scorching sentences out of Prang's letter said themselves over and over in his mind. The situation in all its ugliness rose before him. So Conway would cheat to make sure of victory! Standham would have something to say about that, so would Derry High, so would Oak Hill. Every victory that Conway had secured with Button on the team would be reversed when this business was known. And it should be known. It was only right to have it known. Bob's pitiless scorn kindled against the school and the team that would do this thing. "I'll write Derry High to-morrow," he declared with a thump of his pillow.

Low as the words were spoken, an answer came from the other cot. "Good! Let's have all the schools party to the agreement call 'em to account."

"You awake, too, Jackstraws?"

"Sure. Did you think I'd drop right off to sleep on top of all that we took in to-night?"

"How could they do it, Jack?"

"Search me! What they've done is all I know, the sneaks!"

Bob raised himself on one elbow and landed two more vigorous blows on his pillow. "The more I think about it, the madder I get," he declared. "It grows on me. I'd just like to take that Conway eleven and knock their heads together."

"I wouldn't dirty my hands with 'em," growled Jack. "My, when this thing gets known, they'll want to slink out of sight! It will take Conway years to live it down. I guess they won't carry their heads quite so high for a while."

"It makes me sick to think of it," said Bob. Silence fell in the room. Then the captain broke out abruptly: "Jack, I just can't understand it. I've said it before and I'll say it again. Those Conway fellows have always played clean ball. What's got into them now? You don't suppose—there can be—somewhere—a mistake?"

"No, I don't. Even Thorn agreed with the rest of us and he's not likely to be prejudiced."

"I know." Bob spoke hesitatingly, thinking between his words. "Every little while I see it just as you do, Jack, but in between I

wonder. How much are we biased by all that's been said this fall? We've had reports of the way Conway feels about this game; we know how we feel. But we'd be mad enough if anybody suggested that Standham would cheat to win. Why should we credit Conway, even on pretty good evidence, with doing what we wouldn't do ourselves? Maybe there's another explanation. One minute I feel like that and the next I'm sure we see straight. It's awful not to know what to believe."

"It looks plain enough to me," said Jack.

Bob turned over on his back with a groan. "Do you remember last year and how we misjudged Breck? We hurt him and made ninnies of ourselves, accusing him of cheating. That looked like a clear case, too. We thought we were sure before we acted. Then came the class meeting and Denslow called on Breck to explain. What if Conway should turn out to be another Breck? I tell you it scares me, Jack. It makes me hold back. We mustn't plunge Standham into an awful unfounded row."

"You're not doing it."

"But I'm captain of the team. I'm responsible for the eleven."

"Then you're not going to write Derry High?"

"I don't know. I don't know. I wish to goodness, Jack, I did know."

"Do you mean you're going on to play with Conway just the same?" Jack persisted.

There was no answer from the other cot.

"You mean to swallow Prang's fib and not face him with it?"

Still Bob was silent.

"You're not going to protest Button in the regular way?"

Bob drew a long breath. "Perhaps I am. But I've got to think this thing through, Jack. If I do one thing, what then? If I do the other, well, what then? How far ought we to give Conway the benefit of the doubt?"

"Seems to me we've given 'em a lot of that already," interjected the other. "Fellows ought to draw the line somewhere. What's the matter with you, Bob? You never used to haggle so over making up your mind."

"I never ran against such a ticklish sub-

ject to make it up about. This fazes me, Jack. Honest, it does. But what's the use talking? Let's go to sleep."

Bob rolled himself up in his blankets, and because he was young and healthy and Jack was also young and healthy, soon there was no sound in the room but the regular breathing of two sleepers. But because he was also genuinely harassed in mind, Bob awoke early. The first light had not begun to streak the east when his eyes opened. He lay still for a few minutes, the troublesome subject pricking his thoughts into activity. Then he got up, tiptoeing across the floor. Jack slept, undisturbed. Fumbling in the darkness, Bob slipped into his clothes, threw a sweater over his shoulders, and, shoes in hand, opened the study door, and crept down the stairs. The heavy outer door squeaked as he let himself through. The hinges needed oiling, he reflected. Out in the chill morning air he strode briskly, drawing deep breaths. After a minute or two he broke into a run.

Ever since he could remember, when things bothered him, Bob had gone outdoors. As a little boy he had caught the habit from his

father. No more now than then did he question or explain his reasons; he simply went. A fellow could get at himself better in the open, he might have told you. But he would have been more apt to say that he went because he liked to. So now as he let his feet carry him where they would, his thoughts were busy.

The campus was very quiet. The halls slept, like the boys within them. Only the kitchens, as he passed, gave forth sounds of life. The milkman on his rounds hailed the boy cheerily. They two alone were astir on the campus. But no, a squirrel ran across the dry leaves at one side of the path, and whisking up a tree, scolded shrilly. Bob halted and gathered a handful of chestnuts whose burrs the frost had opened. Settling into a swift stride he walked on, munching. The blood tingled in his veins. His head, where the thoughts had gone whirling round and round the night before, endlessly chasing each other, felt clear and light. The thoughts themselves began to fall into place, lining up in orderly rows where he could inspect them. Now he had left the campus behind him.

The brown road sped backward under his feet. Up hill and down he went, heedless of time. The chill gray light of dawn grew warm about him. The hills veiled themselves mistily before the sun. Life stirred in the sleeping earth. Mellowed by distance the slow strokes of the clock on Center Hall fell on Bob's ears. The sound pricked to his consciousness and with a little shock of surprise he awoke from his brown study.

"Hello," he cried. "So it's that late, is it? You'll have to beat it for home if you want any breakfast, 'Bobby, my son.'"

Wheeling, he began to sprint. Fifteen minutes later, warm but triumphant, a clear light of decision in his eyes, he slipped into a seat at the breakfast table. From the other end of the room Jack watched him come in. "Just did it, didn't he?" he remarked aloud to Ned Hensley, as the last gong sounded. To himself he said, "Now I wonder what he's made up his mind to do. For he's made it up—or I don't know Bob Farrar."

How he had made it up Jack found no opportunity immediately to discover. The roommates, both busy seniors, often joked about

the little they saw of each other by day. "When Bob's studying," Jack would say, "I'm sure to be in class, or the other way round. After Thanksgiving we're going to take time to get acquainted again. Now it's only 'Good-night' in the evening and 'How d'ye do?' in the morning."

What the rest of the school expected of the captain the day was not long in developing. All over the campus throughout the forenoon boys were to be seen putting their heads together, while their jaws moved briskly.

"We'll not play at all."

"No, play. Play, I say, and beat 'em!"

In the post-office lobby, on the way to and from recitations, Standham knew but one subject of talk. Somewhere and at some time, never afterward to be exactly located, a new note entered the discussion. It had, indeed, been sounded before, an idea thrown out in the course of heated parley. It entered the field now with a decisive determination hitherto lacking.

"If Button plays, I know somebody else who plays."

The words, tossed from mouth to mouth, found favor. Their suggestion of well-earned

retribution pleased the boys who heard them, and were passed on grimly.

"Give 'em a dose of their own medicine. Let's see how they like the taste."

"Turn about is fair play."

"I'll bet Farrar won't do it. He's such a stickler for that old inter-school agreement."

"He won't, won't he? You don't know Farrar when his blood is up."

So the talk ran. Jack, hearing, wondered and kept still. To questions he replied only with a laconic, "Can't say."

"There's nothing to be made out of Truman," grumbled the boys.

Scrap overtook Jack at the door of their first afternoon class. "What's Bob going to do?" he whispered.

Jack managed a contortion of his shoulders which might be interpreted as either yes or no, and the bell prevented more definite reply. After class the two joined forces and slipped away together.

"Jolly row coming," said Scrap.

"You bet."

Scrap threw his companion an inquiring look. "Don't you like it, Jackstraws?"

"I'm not so fond of rows as you."

Scrap considered. "I'm not keen myself on Conway blackin' its record like this. But there's somethin' about a fight that gets me every time. Oh, I'm a scrapper fast enough. And to lick those mean low down tricksters ——"

"What if we don't lick 'em?"

"Not lick 'em? With Bob, 'n' Clay Thorn 'n' Ferg—oh, come off, Jack!"

"So Ferguson's going to play, is he?"

Scrap stopped short. "Won't Bob let him? What's his fuss, anyhow?"

"Bob hasn't said anything in my hearing on the subject of Ferguson."

The anxious look faded from Scrap's face. "I guess it's all right then."

Jack stared at him.

"If you think the thing is fixed as easy as that, Scrap, it seems to me you've brought a pretty queer notion of Bob out of these four years together."

"You mean he won't ——

"I tell you I don't mean a thing more than you know yourself. Now see here, Scrap. I haven't seen Bob more than once or twice

since last night. I haven't exchanged ten words with him all day. What he's going to do I don't know. Whether he'll see anything in this Ferguson scheme, I don't know. But I do know Bob, more or less, and I know he takes being captain pretty seriously. He's not half so quick to say things or to do things as he was last year, and I tell you he's not going to begin being in a hurry just now. He'll not jump into any row with his eyes shut, or let Standham, if he can help it. But that doesn't mean he won't play Ferguson if he makes up his mind it's the thing to do. How much chance there is of his deciding that way you can judge as well as I. Bob's no prude, but he's square."

"Where would the crookedness come in if he played Ferg?" demanded Scrap. "Hasn't Conway busted the agreement? Well then, if it takes two parties to make an agreement, and one of 'em breaks it and keeps on breakin' it, there's no agreement, is there? The other party's out, too. Has to be. You can't have one side bound and the other free. Ain't that so?"

"Sounds well. Where'd you get it?"

"Mostly from Heicher. A lot of chaps were talkin', too."

Jack meditated. "It sounds all right," he said again. "I can't make it feel quite so well, but maybe that's because it's too new. Tell it to Bob."

"All right. Where is he? Home?"

"Come on and see."

The two mounted the stairs in Stone. Bob's cheerful whistle floated down to them encouragingly. Bob's gray eyes regarded them from the top of a step-ladder as they entered the study. "Had a little accident here while you were gone, Jackstraws," he said. "The hunters, they hunted themselves to the floor. Nothing broken. Reach me that hammer, will you? Thanks, Scrap. What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"He's got outside of a new idea," said Jack, stuffing a book into a case already full.

Bob listened while Scrap talked. "So the agreement doesn't hold with Conway and we can put Ferg back on the first eleven for that game," he finished.

The captain pounded a nail into the molding before he answered. "Maybe we could—

I'd have to think a while about that—but I guess we'd better not. You see I've decided to take what Prang says for fact."

"But it's not!" gasped Scrap.

"We suspect it's not, and we patch together some evidence. But Prang tells me his men are all right to play. I believe him."

"Honest, Bob?"

"Honest. Oh, I don't understand everything about this mix-up. But I've made up my mind the only thing to do is to act as though we were cock-sure that Conway is as aboveboard as we know Standham is. Better make a mistake that way than the other."

"Didn't I tell you what those Conway chaps said last year?"

"That doesn't prove anything, Scrap."

"But there's Thorn's story, too."

"And here's Prang's letter. What do you want me to do? Tell Prang it's not true? The thing we can't afford to lose is the basis that we've always played on. We haven't liked Conway and they haven't liked us, but we've had to respect each other. We've known their word was good, and they have

always taken ours. If we question their honesty any farther we go so far that it will take years to put the two schools back on the old ground. And that's the only decent footing for sport. We called their attention to something we thought looked crooked. Conway says, 'You're wrong, it's all right.' We've got to take their word. If we don't, we'd better break off relations with 'em straight away. You can't play clean football, and that's the only kind Standham has ever gone in for, with a team that knows you think it's cheating. Let's make up our minds that maybe there's another explanation than the one we've found for this letter business and then give Conway the benefit of the doubt."

Scrap shook his head. "That's too much for me. And what about Oak Hill and Derry High?"

"I guess they can stand what we can."

"The fellows won't like it, Bob."

"Can't help that."

"They won't go in for it, either."

Bob descended the step-ladder and folded it together.

"All right. If I don't take the ground that Prang's honest, I don't play any games with Conway, that's flat."

CHAPTER XVI

ON TRIAL

"Do you really mean it, Bob?" The Crowd, with some others, were gathered in Bob's room.

"I do, Hy."

"Well, of course that's all right in theory. In practice how's it going to work out? That's what the boys will want to know."

"Meaning——"

"Meaning that this school has made up its mind to whip Conway. And it won't care to run any risks, either."

"If you don't protest Button, somebody else will," said Blair.

"Who?"

"What's the matter with Forbes doing it?"

Bob looked across the room to the manager, busy whittling a pencil. "Are you going to protest Button, Shorty?"

That individual deliberately pointed the lead before he answered. Then he snapped the knife blade into place. "Orders of that

sort come from the captain, Blair. I take it a manager is to do the squad's wishes, not to strike out on lines of his own."

"But if the squad wants you to act?" persisted Blair.

"That's not the squad's business," said Bob. "All any team has to do is to play ball. The captain and manager see to it that the conditions are right."

"A team can strike," suggested Hunt.

Bob tilted his chair back against the wall. "Yes, a team can strike. That is, it can say, 'We won't play unless conditions are so-and-so.' But it is still up to the captain or the manager to make 'em so. The team doesn't do it, directly."

"Then there's the school," said Heicher. "The school can vote how the team shall play."

"Not on your life, it can't!" cried Bob. "The school can vote not to play with another school, if it likes, but it hasn't a word to say about the line-up on either side. Thunderation! What do you think an eleven would be good for, Hy, that was made up by the vote of a whole school? No, sir! The coach

and the captain assign positions, and that's all there is to it!"

"You talk as though the captain makes the eleven!"

"Maybe he does, Blair! That's different from saying he's the whole show, and don't you forget it. The team's the thing, and the captain knows it. He's there only for the sake of the team. When a squad picks out a captain, it gives over to him the powers of the individual fellows in the squad. It says, 'Instead of running ourselves, we want you to come and run us. Do it just as well as you know how. We agree to stand by you, whether we like all your decisions or not.' Isn't it so, Scrap?"

"No captain that's onto his job is goin' to let his team have the say-so," Scrap assented, "if that's what you mean, Bob. The boys have learned it in basket-ball, all right."

"Hear! hear!" cried two or three voices. "He's a tyrant, Scrap is."

"It's the only way to have a decent team," said Scrap.

"Fellows make mistakes in choosing a captain," Bob continued. "And a captain makes

mistakes, too. But once chosen, you've got to give him his head. See? Unless you remove him. I'm not setting up for being always in the right, mind you. I'm only saying that I've got to do things the way I see 'em so long as I'm captain of the eleven."

"That's so too," said Scrap, remembering certain stormy passages in his own captaincy.

Blair broke the silence. "We'll grant you all that, Farrar. Let's say you have a right to run your team in your own way. But isn't there any limit? When it comes to risking Standham's chance of victory in the biggest game of the year, what about that? Don't the opinions of the rest of us count for something? Why are you so cock-sure that you're right and we're wrong about Conway?"

"I'm not sure that I'm right, Blair. All I'm sure of is that I'm not sure that you are. I can't act on your uncertainty. I can on mine."

"Why not on ours?"

"Because if you're wrong, that program of yours is going to hurt Standham's name more than you fellows think. Conway would never forget that we persisted against their

denial in saying that they cheated. If I'm wrong, it isn't going to do Standham any harm to have played against a fellow who wasn't eligible for his eleven."

"What if they beat us?"

"I'm not planning to let them beat us, Breck, but even so—supposing for the sake of argument that they win the game, I say it would be better for Standham's reputation among other schools to have it so than to win ourselves at the cost of insisting Button be thrown out. If he really is ineligible, the fact will leak out some time."

"That won't go down with the boys, Bob," warned Blair. "Now is the time they're thinking about, not away off in the winter or the spring or next year, maybe. They want to see that game won here on our own field week after next, not reverting to us some time by default."

"What's more," said Denslow, "they're red hot about it, too."

Spud's round eyes had been regarding Bob all through the talk with a troubled stare. Now he broke into speech. "You can't mean it, Bob! Say you don't. Why, why if

Standham shouldn't whip those fellows—you're not going to risk the chance of downing 'em?"

"Look here, Farrar," Heicher's voice held a new note in it. He glanced around the room quickly. "We're all your friends, and I'm going to speak out. For that matter, everybody in school is your friend—now. You're the most popular fellow in the academy. You must know it. But I tell you, not even you can dare this thing. The school will go pretty far for you, but it won't go this far—not far enough to risk, as Spud says, the chance of victory over Conway. You've done all and more than all that could be expected of you. You've stated your side, the boys know how you feel. They've thought about it more than they would if any other chap had put the case to them. Now if the school demands something that you don't want to do—it will be your opinion against the whole, remember—for pity's sake, Bob, bend a little. The will of the majority, you know. The thing won't be your fault; your hands will be clean. If it goes wrong, nobody can blame you or say you didn't warn us."

"You can say I ought to have stood out."

"Bob Farrar, do you know what it is to have everybody down on you?"

Bob flushed. "Is it coming to that?"

Blair did not mince his words. "If you keep on, yes. Ask the others."

The captain's look searched the faces before him. The Crowd had been silent to-night. They had let Blair and Heicher do most of the talking. Now their very quietness answered him. Denslow met his eyes frankly and gravely; Hunt and Breck avoided his gaze; Hensley drummed on the table with his fingers. Jack stared at the window and the black square it framed; Shorty was again whittling his pencil; Thorn watched the rest. Only little Tom broke the meaning stillness with an indignant cry.

"They never would!"

Bob let his chair come down on its four legs with a thump. "Much obliged to you all. I'm forewarned, anyhow."

"You're not ——" began Blair.

"I'll think about it—after the game to-morrow. Scrap, Clay, Ned, the rest of you football players, it's up to us to be getting to our

beds. Stop thinking about this thing and sleep, mind you."

"Well," remarked Shorty as he began the nightly distribution of his clothes over study and bedroom, "I hope to goodness things go right on the gridiron to-morrow. There's no telling what will happen if they don't."

The game was at Standham. The academy played a high school from a neighboring town, and the visitors arrived in full force. They swarmed over their half of the new grand stand and made the air resound with assertions that there could nowhere be, on the planet or off of it, for that matter, an eleven like their eleven. To which Standham replied as vociferously. It was the first time the academy and this particular high school had tried conclusions, and each was eager to test the other's mettle. Standham, moreover, was looking for surprises. Mysterious hints had filtered into football talk, hints of a strange new play, devised by Davenport, which the eleven was perfecting in private.

"That's what all this secret practice has been for," one boy would whisper to his neigh-

bor. "S-sh! Nobody speaks of it out loud. But there's something doing."

To-day rumor had it that a first appearance of the wonderful trick might be expected. The school was agog with curiosity. From his place as leader of the cheering Shorty pumped his arms up and down, up and down, up and down, rhythmically, methodically, spiritedly. The shoulders of the boys in front of him rose and fell in time with their clenched fists. As has been said, Shorty believed in noise. Now and then they broke into song. The words were not Bolton's. They had come into being, shouted at the top of a stout pair of lungs, and they had about them much more "go" than rhyme or rhythm. But since "go" is the quality absolutely needful in a football song, this one fulfilled its purpose admirably and with it the Standham supporters pounded the merits of their team into company ears. Whereupon it developed that the visitors also thought well enough of their team to have made ready a celebration of its achievements, past, present, and future, that left nothing to the imagination in the way of either confidence or praise.

Bolton listened with twinkling eyes. "They make me think of those chestnuts people are always cracking on the way a certain kind of American tries to make himself understood in Paris," he said to Heicher. "He goes at it by talking English at the top of his lungs. It stands to reason somebody will catch on if he makes noise enough."

Heicher grinned. "That's one virtue of noise. If you do make enough the other fellow gets impressed with it and thinks maybe a little of what you say is so. Shouldn't be a bit surprised if the High has a pretty fair team. Fellows don't generally yell quite so loud over nothing. Hello, there's Ferguson, poor old codger." Heicher signaled wildly. "Come over here, Ferg! Here's a seat."

The ex-guard stumbled over the legs and arms of intervening boys and slipped into the vacant place, nodding to Bolton.

"Wish you were going to get out there," said Heicher.

"You can't wish that as much as I do. Farrar thinks they look like something of an eleven. U-m, but I'd like a turn at 'em!"

Ferguson's eyes followed Fulton longingly

as he trotted on to the checker-board. Players were getting to position. "If I weren't such an old dunderhead!" he muttered.

The editor slapped him on the back. "Cheer up, old man. Two weeks from to-day you'll be there."

Ferguson stared at him and understanding dawned in his face. "What would the prin say to that idea?"

"Nothing, if he didn't know it till afterward."

"He'll be at the game, won't he?"

"Likely so. But he's not going to stop play to call out a man, when he's told there's another like him on the other side. The prin's a good sport."

Bolton listened in silence. "There they go," he said at last.

The checker-board, which a minute before had held twenty-two quiet figures, was now covered by moving players. Bob had won the kick-off and Denslow had sent the ball sailing down the field toward the High's goal. There the High's left half-back received it and started to run. Standham stopped him

and the ball was dead. In the scrimmage that followed the High's left end got away safely for a twenty yard gain. Elated, the visitors pushed on, the home team falling back before them to within ten yards of the Standham goal. There the High stuck, fighting stubbornly, until Denslow emerged from the tangle, grabbed the ball, and a moment later sent it out of harm's way for a time. The Standham end of the grand stand heaved a long sigh of relief and proceeded to let Denslow know what it thought of him.

For the next five minutes play seesawed back and forth near the middle of the field. Then steadily, irresistibly, the High's rush began again. In vain Bob strove to keep his men to their work, in vain he signaled plays that had never failed before. In vain Thorn tried to man at once his own and Fulton's position. The visitors had discovered the weak spot in Standham's line, and they flowed through it and over chalk-mark after chalk-mark, a triumphant wave that broke only to reform nearer the Standham goal.

On the grand stand the academy again grew frantic.

"What's the matter with 'em?"

"Can't Fulton do anything at all?"

"Look at him! There he goes again! A-a-ah! You'd think after a while he'd learn that's just what the High wants of him."

"Which side does Fulton think he's playing on, anyhow?"

"Hunt's missed that fellow! Hunt! I say, what next!"

"They're goin' to make it, sure."

"Yell, fellows!" adjured Shorty. "Three times three now! Rah, rah, rah ——"

But in spite of Standham's loyal cheers they did make it. The High rose en masse and shouted its man across the goal line with a gusto that struck Standham as a trifle overdone. When the High failed at the kick, the home school felt better. "Frink wouldn't have missed," they said confidently.

Before the ball went into play again Bob called Breck from the side-lines. "What's that for?" demanded the grand stand.

"What's-his-name's winded. He looks it."

"Huh! Winded. I like a team that can stand more than this."

"Say," growled a boy to Ned Hensley, "they haven't played worse all the fall."

"Shut up," Hensley growled back.

It was a gloomy set of boys that dropped to chairs and couches in the basement of the gymnasium between halves.

"What's the matter with us?" demanded Peters, applying his lips to a lemon.

Hunt dropped his head into his hands. "I ought to be thrown off the team, missing a straight tackle the way I did! Why don't you maul me, some of you chaps?"

Bob, coming in, caught his words. The captain's eye ran rapidly over the doleful figures. "You can just bet I will," he cried, "if I hear any more of that talk! Take those sulks off your faces, you fellows, this minute. You look like a set of whipped puppies. Where's your grit? One half doesn't make a game. There's time enough to win yet. Remember Davenport's play."

"Going to run it in?" asked Hunt.

"Sure I am. What's that play for? To lay up in your minds and think about? Or to get out on the field with? We're going to put it in practice and I'm counting on it with

your help to give us the game yet. We'll pitch in and work this next half. Let's show these fellows how Standham plays ball. What's one touch-down? Nothing that Standham can't better if we set out to do it. The High won't make any more points today."

Bob's hearty words, matched by his cheerful, friendly smile, and more than either the sense of the captain's confidence in his play which Bob managed somehow to convey to every boy in the room, set the men on their feet. They were already a different looking group of boys when Shorty sauntered in and commenced to talk nonsense as only Shorty knew how. In five minutes he had them laughing, and the good work Bob had begun was finished.

If it had not been for one of those mischances to which the best of players is now and then liable and which nobody can ever satisfactorily explain, everything might have gone well. Bob's forecast came true. The High made no more goals. Standham put into its play a ginger that the first half had found wanting; the old solidarity of the

eleven seemed to have returned in full force. No more did the High push Standham steadily down the field; even Fulton managed at least a third of the time to block his opponent's moves.

Ten minutes had passed, ten minutes of hard, snappy play, when Bob signaled for the new combination. Standham had the ball on the High's twenty yard line. Now for a touch-down. Suddenly the grand stand saw a curious change come over the face of the field. At the signal guards, tackles, and ends on the Standham line shifted to either side, leaving Thorn alone in the middle of the field. At the same time Bob dropped back to Denslow's place and the full-back stood a yard to the left. Not knowing what to do, but suspecting a feint to draw off his men, the High's captain held his line in place. From center the ball snapped to quarter. Bob handed it to the full-back. Denslow passed it to Peters. How what happened next came about nobody could tell afterward, least of all the end himself. All Peters knew was that as his arm went out to cradle the ball, he saw a free field ahead for the run. Why

should he fail on what he had done perfectly scores of times in practice?

A groan broke from the lips of the academy rooters. The end had muffed.

The ball went into play twenty-five yards back, and Standham never saw the High's goal posts any nearer. In the minutes that remained, Hunt redeemed his earlier record by a clever tackle, and Bob blocked a run by the High's captain, much to that player's surprise and discomfiture. Then the timekeeper's whistle shrilled above the sound of many voices. The visitors streamed triumphantly off the grand stand and across the campus to their waiting car. Standham followed, outwardly sprightly. Gayety fell away when beyond hearing of the High's supporters.

At the crosswalk that led to Horton the stream divided. Blair, parting from the Crowd, halted for a final word. His voice, husky from yelling, yet carried far.

"And that's the team we're going to put up against Conway!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE VOICE OF THE SCHOOL

SHORTY stuck his head into 29 Stone that evening and found Bob alone with his books.

"Plugging?" queried the manager. "Where's Jackstraws?"

"At the libe. Come in and make yourself at home. There's not much use in my trying to grind to-night."

The captain pushed his chair back from the table and, yawning, stretched his arms above his head. He watched Shorty saunter about the room, hands in pockets. The manager stopped at the bookcase to inspect a photograph.

"Hello, when'd you get this?"

"Just to-night. Pretty good of the pater, isn't it?"

The other stared at the picture. "I'd think I was back in camp if it weren't for those clothes." He continued to stare mechanically long after the man's face had ceased to hold

his thoughts. Bob, watching him, understood. After a while Shorty came and perched on the edge of the table and the two looked at each other.

"Got 'em bad, B. F.?"

"Got 'em some."

"It's been an off day for us."

"Meanest time we could have had it, too."

"Every team gets 'em. Gid's last year was a good bit worse than this."

"It happened earlier in the season; that made it count less."

"The High put up a strong game."

"We didn't look for a team of kittens. There's no use blinking the truth, Shorty. The way the first half went was my fault. I didn't have hold of my team."

Shorty grunted. "What about Peters? You're to blame for that, too, I suppose?"

"No. I shoulder only my own. Between you and me, there wasn't any excuse for Peters' fumble. Sheer carelessness."

"Pretty expensive carelessness. We'd have won if Peters' hadn't muffed."

"He's cut up enough about it. Don't rub it in."

"Who's rubbing it in? I'm stating facts."

"Let's have some more then. Why did the eleven slip through my fingers in the first half?"

"That's easy. Too much talk."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Those fellows were demoralized by all this jawing about Conway. They've heard so much talk and talked so much themselves that they've begun to wonder if it isn't true that they ought to run the eleven instead of you. What would you expect of 'em in a game? When the High had knocked the idea into their heads that they weren't so smart as they thought they were, then came your chance to turn 'em into a team again."

Bob stared at the blotter. "There's something in it."

"Of course there's something in it. You'll find it's pretty much the whole explanation, too."

A knock sounded on the door and Tom Thompson came in. "Why, where are the boys?"

"Not here to-night," Bob answered. "They're 'round the campus somewhere."

"I tell you, Bob," pursued Shorty relentlessly, "you've got to pull those fellows up short if you want to save the team. A fortnight of this sort of thing and we're done for. We can't weather it; no eleven could. The school's buzzing like a hornet's nest. For every fellow on the squad there are ten more to talk to him and tell him the captain's not using the academy right, things ought to be done so and so. I'm not suggesting how to act; I'm only saying that wherever the school stands the captain and the team have got to stick together."

"That is," said Bob, "either I've got to go with them or they've got to come with me."

"Just so."

"They'll do it, Bob," Tom cried, "if you want 'em to. Don't they always? But I just wish Dave Bolton had never seen the old letter that wasn't his!"

"Amen to that!" said Shorty.

"You know the talk," Bob spoke slowly. "I haven't heard any to-night. Aren't the boys cooling off a bit?"

"They're just warming up to it," the manager answered.

"I wish I was big enough to shake some of those fellows." Tom's anger trembled in his voice. "What business have they to talk the way they do?"

"Talk's cheap," growled Shorty. "And the cheaper it is, the easier it comes out of some chaps' mouths."

"Are you advising me to do anything in particular?" Bob asked.

"I'm not advising, B. F. It's up to you to figure out the thing to be done. Then you can count on me to back you up in it."

"Me, too," cried Tom. "Shall I knock 'em down when they say things? If I thought they really meant half of it, I would anyhow."

Bob laughed. "Go slow, Tom. We'll let 'em live a little while longer. When the time comes for knocking anybody down, I'll pass the word. It's the same old story, I suppose. Or have they found something new to growl about?"

"They don't like the play," said Tom, "the

new one you tried to-day, Bob. They can't see any good in it."

"That's the main trouble to-night," Shorty agreed. "Davenport's play. You're crazy to have put it on at all. No wonder it lost Standham the game. What else could you expect? And if you should be so far out of your mind as to try it again, you'd be qualifying for a lunatic asylum, straight off. That's the way it goes. They don't like experiments, they don't."

It did not take Bob many days to learn the truth of Shorty's words. Boys fell into step with him on the campus to say, "What was that queer thing you were trying to do in the game Saturday? Cut it out, Farrar." Advice poured in upon him from every quarter, all pointing toward two issues. Conway must be remonstrated with and the new play abandoned.

"Give it out that you'll agree," boys urged him. "The school's getting stirred up over this, Farrar. Of course, we know you mean to do the best thing for the academy, and that would be enough to know at most times. You don't generally stand on pride. Speak

out now and stop the talk. We'll spread what you say. It will make things pleasanter for everybody."

"My notions of what's good for Standham don't agree with yours, I'm afraid," said Bob.

"Is that straight?"

"That's straight."

Even the team remonstrated against continued practice of the new play. Hunt openly urged that it be dropped; Breck confessed to thinking the captain mistaken. "It's risky, Bob," Scrap warned. "I'm for giving it the go-by. Let's stick to old plays that we're sure of."

"We're sure of this," Bob would answer. "That error of Saturday won't happen again. No team ever repeats a play to just the same tune."

Harley Peters unexpectedly reinforced Bob's words. "It wasn't the play's fault that we didn't make a touch-down by it. I muffed, and don't you fellows forget it. Just the same, I'm not keen on running it in again. I say with Scrap, old tricks are safer."

"Yes, he keeps us practicin' it," the squad

told boys who questioned them. "Farrar believes in that play."

"He's obstinate, you mean," sneered one or two of the listeners.

Davenport, arriving in the middle of the week, listened to the captain's account of the situation and nodded sagely. "You remember I prophesied that some such thing might happen."

"Yes," Bob answered, "I've been kept remembering it pretty often these last few days."

"They're bringing a lot of pressure to bear on you, aren't they?"

"They're raking up every argument they can find."

"Going to stick to the play?"

"Didn't I say I would?"

"Things look different sometimes when it comes to the pinch."

"I guess we'll try it out again."

"Good!" Davenport slapped the captain on the shoulder. "You're all right. But what's to come of all this hubbub in the school?"

"Nothing, probably. I've a notion it will blow over."

The coach pondered. "I hope you're right. You have a stiff upper lip, Farrar."

"I don't know whether I have or not—yet," said Bob frankly. "It's not really been tested. But if this fuss doesn't simmer down, I stand a chance of finding out."

"You're sure of the game Saturday?"

"I think so. Nobody worries much about that."

"If I were you, I'd lay off Peters during one half or other. That boy Hayes is the one to call in at the pinch. You want to give him all the practice possible."

"Scrap talks a good deal," said Bob, "but when it comes to acting he'll obey orders every time."

"Pretty good recommendation. Hope the rest will prove of the same pattern. I'll be up the first of the week and see you through." Davenport spoke slowly, emphasizing his words. "As for Button, you're right, of course, if you can only make the squad feel so. It's coming to a question of how far your men will go with you against the school. You have a mighty fine team, Farrar, in the pink of condition and hard as nails. You

ought to be proud of it. But your work isn't done yet. Keep them with you!"

Bob walked back to his rooms after seeing the coach off on the trolley, thinking hard. Davenport evidently distrusted the situation. He remembered Shorty's words, "The captain and the team have got to stick together." Just the night before the manager had asked him if his nerve was good. What did it mean? Bob's thoughts raced back over the past few days. Was he mistaken in believing that, given time enough, the boys would quiet down? He remembered Heicher's warning. It had been coming true this week. He had felt the changed attitude of the school; the air he breathed had been laden with criticism and disfavor. Bob did not try to pretend that it meant nothing to him. He cared and he acknowledged it frankly. He liked to be liked. He liked to have other boys speak well of him. He was not used to disapproval.

For most of his life Bob had had things his own way. To be sure, Bob's way had generally been a sensible, manly way, thanks to his father's influence and his father's friendship. Other boys had liked to follow in it. But

now—was something coming that he did not foresee? Was the school really in earnest in its opposition? But what could happen? And if anything did, on whom could he rely? Shorty he was sure of, and Tom Thompson, and Jack—of course, Jack. What about the rest of the Crowd? And would the Crowd be enough, if the academy turned against him? Enough of friends? After all, was it worth while to stand out about Button? Why not write again to Conway? Yes, and play Ferguson, too? Bob's blood leaped at the thought of playing Ferguson. Could he?

Gid's words, "I didn't win last year, you must," floated in his brain. The way to win was clear; with Ferguson at guard. What was it Mr. Wetherell had said? "So long as we have the rule, we must abide by it." But suppose Conway were not abiding by it; he had only the captain's word to prove Button free to play. Why not press Prang further? He wouldn't like it, of course, but——

"Never forget to be a gentleman." Tom had repeated something like that last year while he, Bob, was coaching him for the races. Bob's father had said it, too. And the school

wouldn't be satisfied with protesting Button now; feeling had risen too high for that. No, he must play Ferguson, if he would please the academy, and why not? So the thoughts ran together in Bob's head, a strange jumble.

Three hours later and it was nine o'clock. Bob, busy with his Latin, Jack poring over algebra, worked on, unheeding. Doors slammed, feet raced along the corridors, and the house was still. Half an hour passed and Bob shut his book with a snap.

"Quit, Jackstraws!"

Jack scribbled for a minute and obeyed. "Just done. Hello, what's the matter with everybody? It's quiet enough to be the middle of the night."

Bob turned from depositing his Virgil on the book-shelf. "It is still. Listen!"

A sound as of many feet tramping rhythmically came to the boys' ears. It beat its way in through a lowered window, swinging nearer. Jack dashed to the window, jerked up the sash and leaned out. Bob followed him. Nobody was in sight, but the tread of feet grew on the night air.

"Come on," Bob cried. "Let's go down!"

As he spoke a dark mass rounded the corner of the dormitory wall and poured across the grass toward them. Straight on it flowed, a shapeless crowd of figures, indistinctly seen in the dimness.

"They're coming here! Under these windows," Jack exclaimed.

A knock at the door startled them. Absorbed in watching and listening to sounds without, they had not heard other feet upon the stairs. Bob started forward. "Come in," he called.

Blair headed the boys who entered at the words. They came in soberly, nodding to Bob and Jack or making no salutation, grave, stern-faced, intent. They spread out behind Blair and the last boy shut the door. Instinctively Bob stiffened. They were his classmates; he ran over their faces swiftly. Where was Heicher? Where were the Crowd? Jack at the window raised his hand to lower the sash.

"Leave it up, please, Jack," said Blair.

The editor's eyes met the captain's. Cool and gray and steady, Bob's returned the gaze. Boys by the door shifted uneasily from one

foot to the other. A strained look settled on their faces.

"Do you fellows want to talk to me?" Bob asked.

"Yes," said Blair, "we do. And first, Farrar, before we say what we have come here to-night to say, understand that we have nothing against you personally. Standham has shown what it thinks about you often enough; it showed it pretty clearly when it made you captain of the eleven. Some of us have an idea that perhaps you don't understand just how the school feels about one or two things. That's why we're here. About all of Standham Academy that isn't in this room right now is under your window. Hear that?"

Many voices rose from below, scores on scores, mingling in one deep insistent chant. The roar, resonant, mighty, resolved itself into words, words that repeated themselves over and over and over, menacingly, commandingly. "We want Ferguson! We want Ferguson! We—want—Ferguson!"

Deliberately Bob stepped to the window and looked down. There they were, as Blair

had said, the whole school; a sea of heaving shoulders. The shrill treble of the junes mingled with the gruffer voices of the older boys. A grim note caught his ear; there was no room for uncertainty now about what Standham wanted. A sudden sharp understanding of what it meant not to be liked caught Bob like a spasm of physical pain. Words formed themselves in his mind.

"Why, if the fellows feel so strongly as this about it, I ——"

Blair was speaking. "Tell them if Prang insists on putting Button into the game you'll play Ferguson."

Bob stepped back from the window. He stood, one hand resting on the table, fronting the petitioning faces. His own went a little white as he spoke. As though he were listening to another he heard his voice. "I can't, Blair. Even if we knew for certain Button's record ——"

Blair raised his hand quickly. "Take it back, Bob," he said. "Think it over."

"I'm sick of thinking it over. Two wrongs don't make a right. I'm sorry, but I can't do it."

"It's final, then?"

Bob nodded. "Anything else?"

"We were going to say that we hoped you wouldn't use that queer play again ——"

Bob's eyes snapped. "As long as I'm captain of the team I decide the plays to be used. Understand? You can tell it to the school."

Blair flushed. "We've given you fair warning, remember."

"That's all right," said Bob. "I think we understand each other."

The editor turned to those behind him. "It's no use. We'd better be going."

Bob and Jack watched them file out. On the threshold Blair paused. "You're a pig-headed donkey, Farrar! Can't you stop him?" to Jack.

"Don't blame Jack," said Bob. "He's done his best. Good-night, Blair."

Wheeling, Jack shut the window. But they could still hear Blair as he stood on the steps and briefly shouted to the crowd the result of the interview. He was answered by an angry roar, followed by a rattle of staccato suggestions. Finally the mob broke up into

excited groups. Into the study for several minutes penetrated the sounds of voices and tramping feet, moving farther and farther away into the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

"ARE you fellows going to let this school be run by one fellow?" demanded the center of one group, gesticulating excitedly. "That's what it's come to, Farrar or the academy. Take your choice."

The boys who listened stole furtive glances at each other, even while they tingled at the speaker's ardor.

"It's up to us," he pursued hotly. "You were there last night. You, all of us, helped show Farrar how we felt. He turned us down. Now what are we going to do about it? Sit around and twiddle our thumbs?"

"What can we do?" one asked practically.

"We can show him that when this school says a thing, we mean it."

"But how? He's captain of the eleven, ain't he? You aren't thinking of putting him off the team."

"What's to hinder having a new captain?"

At this revolutionary proposal the group gasped.

"Who?"

"Anything the matter with Clayton Thorn?"

"Thorn wouldn't take it!"

"Wait and see. You can't tell what a fellow will do till you ask him."

"But he and Farrar are thick as thieves."

"That's all right. Nobody's asking him to go back on his pal. Thorn's got sense. And he'll see fast enough that after what's happened the present captain's got to go. What won't bend breaks. Ever hear that? Farrar said so long as he was captain of the eleven he'd do so-and-so. If he isn't captain of the eleven, his mind will be easy, won't it? The fellow who relieves him of his job does Farrar a good turn. And Thorn's the man to do it."

"You mean to have Farrar keep on playing?"

"Of course. He's quarter-back. You don't think we'd stand a chance of winning that game without him, do you?"

"That sounds all very well," interrupted a voice. "But you're reckoning without your

two principals. How are you going to get Farrar and Thorn to agree to that little swap?"

"Easy enough. Listen here. If he's not captain Farrar will play with a clean conscience. He won't be responsible for what happens. Well then, when it's presented to him, he's going to welcome any plan that takes this load off his shoulders, and puts it on somebody who isn't so squeamish. When he's had time to get used to the idea, he'll see it's the only thing to do and begin to wish he'd thought of it himself. Then he'll go to Thorn, who's been holding out meanwhile, saying he can't take it, Farrar's his friend and all that—Farrar will go to Thorn, I say, and say, 'See here, old man, I really wish you'd take it. You'll be doing me no end of a good turn.' Why, I tell you it's the one way out. It lets Farrar down easy and keeps everybody happy."

"We can't put Thorn in as captain," said another. "It's the squad's business to do that. And how do we know the squad will agree to this scheme?"

"Go and ask 'em. When you see a fellow

on the squad, buttonhole him, produce the plan and ask what he thinks of it. Ten to one, he'll say after he's a bit used to the notion that he can't see why nobody proposed it before."

"Who's going to sound Farrar?"

"Leave that to the squad. All we have to do is to work the players up to the idea. They'll do the rest."

"And if they want a fellow outside the squad to put it to Farrar ——"

"They'll find him ready."

"Are we sure how Thorn stands?" questioned a cautious boy. "Does anybody know the way he feels about playing Ferguson?"

"Thorn isn't an old Betty!"

"Hold on there! I don't go with Farrar quite to the length of his rope, but if you mean by that remark that the captain's an old Betty ——"

"Stop quarreling! Nobody means anything. Farrar's obstinate, you'll admit that. I'm going to find Thorn."

The group broke up into twos and threes who started off in different directions. Whenever they met other groups or even

single boys they stopped and talked. Sooner or later in the course of the afternoon they canvassed nearly the entire school.

Clayton Thorn, issuing from recitation in Center Hall, found a couple of seniors waiting by the door to pounce upon him. "Come over here. We want to talk to you," they said.

Thorn went. "What's up now?"

The seniors plunged into explanation. What one omitted the other supplied. Thorn listened in silence, and the fact encouraged them to keep on. They made a very fine sounding case of it, so fine, indeed, that they persuaded themselves quite out of every remaining doubt as to the scheme's entire practicability and worth.

"When the boys bring this matter up, you'll consider it, won't you, Thorn? Farrar will be the first to thank you for helping him out of a tight place."

Thorn waited a minute. "Yes, when the squad makes a proposition like that to me, I'll consider it. I can promise you so much. Now, if you chaps are all done, listen to me."

A sparkle crept into his eyes. "What the captain says, goes. Understand? I don't

mean a captain. I'm talking about the captain, Bob Farrar. It doesn't make any difference whether you like what he's doing or not. You fellows outside the football squad have done a lot of talking this last week. You're still at it, I see. I suppose you know it's the worst possible thing you could do for the school. You've thought probably how you're weakening the strength of support the team is getting. Now you propose to break up the eleven itself. And that's what you call being loyal to Standham! I'll take Farrar's kind of loyalty every time, Ferguson or no Ferguson. It isn't half so risky."

"But——" interposed the astonished boys.

"You're listening to me now, aren't you? I tell you this school is playing with fire, and it won't be your fault if we don't all get scorched next week. You're taking the straight course to a licking. If you don't want Conway to walk all over us, keep still and let Bob Farrar mind his own business. He's equal to it. That's all I've got to say. Except that I don't want to hear any more of this captain racket from anybody. Spread the fact, will you?"

In his room at Horton other boys found Denslow. The popular full-back cut them short with their tale hardly begun. "Cut it out!" he commanded. "I'm tired of this tommy-rot about Conway and Button. Always Button. Find something else to say before you come around next time. You're making Farrar's work any amount harder for him, and that's all you're doing. Quit it!"

"But, Ned, you don't understand. The new point is, wouldn't we—the squad, I mean—ease up this whole business by putting somebody—Thorn, or you, maybe—in Farrar's place? He'll be glad enough to get rid of the job as things stand."

"See here, if you've come in to talk that kind of thing, just get out before you begin. I won't listen to such rubbish."

"Keep cool, Ned. Don't you remember Farrar said, 'So long as I am captain of this team'? Perhaps he was thinking of just such a transfer."

"Rot! Why don't you wait for him to suggest it?"

"But, Ned," cried a second speaker, "do you think Farrar's doing the best thing by

Standham, holding to Prang's letter the way he does?"

Denslow caught up his cap from a chair. "I don't think," he said bluntly. "I take Bob Farrar on trust. I hope I'm not enough of a dunderhead to have to know him more than a year before I can say that."

And Denslow went out, and the door slammed after him.

On the campus he met Thorn. "Look here," began the latter abruptly, "have you heard any of this nonsense about Farrar? Have any of them talked to you?"

Denslow nodded. "They made me mad!"

The two fell into step.

"This is what comes of last night's foolishness, I suppose," said Thorn.

"Likely."

"Is everybody bitter?"

"Looks pretty general, I'm afraid."

"Where does Heicher stand?"

"Don't know. It was he kept Shorty in Bolton's room last night while the racket was going on."

"Don't I know? I was there, too. Bolton was as innocent as a pussy-cat. Maybe he

wasn't mad when he found out how he'd been used!"

"They kept everybody busy who might have spoken up and said things."

"What was the matter with Jack's talking? Seems to me the president of the athletic association might have made a few remarks."

"He told me this morning he was so stumped by the whole business that all the things he might have done never occurred to him till afterward."

They tramped for the next five minutes in silence. Then Thorn stopped short. "What are we going this way for?"

"Because we're a pair of idiots," said Denslow. "Let's find Bob."

"Right!" The other brought out the word crisply.

The two turned and retraced their steps across the campus. Pushing into Stone Hall, they clattered up-stairs and thumped on Bob's door. The captain was at home. He had just come in from recitation and was in the act of tearing off his sweater when they dashed into the study.

"Hello," he cried, after a single glance. "What's doing now?"

"You've got to be doing," said Thorn. "Listen." Swiftly he told what had happened, Denslow throwing in now and then a word of further explanation.

Before they were quite through Shorty entered.

"Did they tackle you, too?"

"Never a word until I pulled it out of 'em. Breck made the yarn over to me. I verified it at headquarters." Shorty grinned reminiscently. "Some fellows don't look happy when they see me coming."

"What'd you do?"

"Do?" The manager slipped down in the well worn seat of one of the big leather chairs and crossed his legs comfortably. "I conducted a little review in Standham history, that's one thing I did. Guess some memories were getting rusty. And I made what the newspapers call a few pointed inquiries about last night. That's another thing. They didn't seem to enjoy it. They squirmed. After I'd chased 'em all around the block, metaphorically speaking, I came up here."

Thorn threw the manager an admiring look. "Wish I'd been there to see and hear, partner."

"It wasn't bad." Shorty grinned as at a pleasant memory. "Shorty got 'em going some, he did." His face relapsed into gloom again. "Just tell me what good it's going to do, though."

Thorn ground his heel into the rug and Denslow stared moodily at his boots.

Another knock at the door brought Hunt. He stopped abruptly on the threshold when he saw the three solemn faces. "Having a funeral here? You look it, all but Bob."

"Come in, Hunt, and shut the door," said Bob. "I want to ask you something. How much did you mean when you said the other night that the team might go on a strike?"

"Did I say that?"

Bob turned to the others. "You were all in Shorty's room that evening."

Denslow wagged his head. "Sure, you said it, Hunt."

"Fact," agreed Thorn.

"No use trying to prove an alibi," said Shorty.

Hunt flushed. "If you fellows say so, then I must have done it. But I tell you I don't remember one single thing about a remark like that. We were talking rather up in the air, and I let off some words with the rest. That's honestly all I know. Why, Bob, I say ——" Hunt stopped aghast. "You don't mean all this comes from just that offhand remark of mine?"

"No," said Bob, "I don't think it does. So cheer up, Hunt. That wasn't why I asked. I was only wondering where you stood now."

"With you," cried Hunt promptly. "You're captain of the team, aren't you? That doesn't mean I wouldn't like you to do some things differently, Bob, and you know it. But when it comes to breaking up the eleven, why I'm not that kind of an idiot."

"How many of the squad feel the way you do?"

Hunt shook his head over Bob's words. "Can't say exactly. They're wobbling some."

"I'd like to pack that squad onto a train and keep 'em out of talking distance of the academy till after the game," said Shorty.

"Wish you could!" Hunt cried. "It

would be the best thing that could happen to Standham."

"'If wishes were horses,'" Thorn quoted. "I learned that in the nursery."

Bob's brow cleared. "Why not isolate 'em here?"

"What's that?"

"Oh, it won't be easy, but the fellows can do it if they want to badly enough. Anyhow, it's worth trying."

"If you'd say what you mean, Bob Farrar, so stupid chaps like me could catch on," began Hunt.

"I'm going to call the squad together here in this room to-night," Bob announced. "We'll give up signal practice for once. When everybody else in the school is talking I think I'll have a try at it myself."

CHAPTER XIX

BOB MEETS THE SQUAD

Bob looked around on the boys who sprawled across couches, tables, and chairs and overflowed on to the floor. They were chaffing each other, if not quite in their usual careless fashion, with a close imitation of it that would have deceived a casual onlooker.

"Of course he ate 'em all!" Scrap was saying. "Did you ever see Shorty when he couldn't get away with everything in sight?"

"Little boys who have lived in camp would better be careful," warned that individual. "A fellow learns a lot about his pals in camp. Fact."

"Huh!" cried Scrap. "Meanin' you know some tales on me? I'll bet you don't. Not a one that I can't better with you for a subject."

Bob, listening and watching, throwing in a word now and then, felt a sudden inexplica-

ble tightening in his throat. These were the boys with whom all through the fall on the football field he had fought shoulder to shoulder for Standham. Together they had gone down to defeat, together they had advanced to victory. Little Tom Thompson, Scrap, Breck, Thorn, every substitute and scrub as well as every first eleven player, had done his share to build up the team. How loyally they had worked! How splendidly they had seconded the captain's every effort! To many of them reward had come only in seeing the team grow stronger, in watching other fellows get ahead of them. And they had counted it worth while. He had made no demand to which they had not willingly responded. And now? What were they going to do now?

The thought suddenly came to Bob that in that room to-night the game would be lost or won. And with the thought his worry fell away. The cool steadiness that had never deserted him yet on the gridiron returned. "The worse play goes," Breck had said once, "the cooler Bob gets. That's the captain's way."

Harley Peters slipped breathlessly into the study and the ranks were full.

"Fellows." The ring of confidence was in the captain's voice, and the boys turned to him expectantly. It put them in mind somehow of the open field and another team standing up against them, a team that they were going to do their best to beat; hadn't the captain said they could if they tried? "Fellows, I asked you to come here to-night so that we could talk together a bit. I don't have to say what about, do I? There's just one thing Standham is thinking and talking of these days, and that is beating Conway. I take it we're all agreed it's the thing to be done."

"Well, rather." The squad chuckled a little.

"And we are the fellows who have got to do the whipping, we in this room. So the question of how to do it comes to us. Isn't that straight?"

The boys agreed.

"I'm glad you think so. There are a lot of chaps in this school who don't think it, you know. They have a notion it's their

business to decide some of these questions or at least to show us how to decide. They've been trying to help us run things right pretty much all day." A twinkle crept into Bob's eye. "I say, fellows, is there one of you in this room who hasn't been talked to about having a new captain?"

The question caught the listeners off guard. The genuine interest of the tone in which it was uttered disarmed suspicion. All at once the squad found itself back again on easy terms with Bob Farrar.

"I thought not. There's a good deal in the idea. Anybody can see that. What we've got to decide to-night is whether it's the best thing on the whole for the school. How do you feel about it? Speak out, honestly. We're up against too big a result to flunk saying just what we think."

"I don't like it a bit," said Tom stoutly. "And I don't see a single thing in the idea, either!"

"Nor I." Denslow's voice rang clear and decided. "There's only one captain that we know how to work with."

"We've managed to worry along so far

through the fall with him," Thorn remarked. "I'm for sticking by him now."

"Nobody wants a change," said Fulton, "if Farrar will listen to reason."

"My position hasn't shifted, Fulton," put in Bob.

"I don't see that we need a change anyhow," said Breck. "Suppose Bob does feel this way, it won't surely keep us from winning the game, will it?"

"Maybe so," said Peters.

"I said surely ——"

"Maybe not, too," cried Denslow. "I say let's beat Button. Don't you fellows think victory is going to mean more to Standham if we have the strongest kind of a team to play against, instead of a second-rater?"

"Conway's eleven is no second-rate bunch, minus Button." Peters spoke decidedly.

"He's their strongest back," said Bob.

"Beat them all!" cried Tom. "Then they can't ever say, 'If we'd been able to put Button into that game ——' I think it would be great to beat with all their best men playing."

"Yes, let's do it up brown," agreed three or four voices.

"Don't be too sure. You fellows forget there's more to this than talking. Beat if we can, you'd better say," remarked Frink.

"That's understood," said Thorn. "What we're discussing is the odds against us."

"Oh, be good sports!" urged Hunt.

"And lose the game?" Peters asked.

"Who's afraid?" cried Tom.

"Not you." Thorn laughed. "I say, fellows, we might well pattern after Thompson here. Let's take the dare."

Bob felt the new turn in the talk, but some faces still looked doubtful.

"I'm going to ask you to take a vote," he said. "Written ballots. Then you'll feel perfectly free to put down exactly what you think. And I'm not asking you to vote whether or not to protest Button or anything else that is a question of policy. Do you want a new captain? That's the point. We've worked pretty well together this fall, and I know you well enough to know that it's the good of the school you'll be thinking of in your vote. And I think you know me well enough to understand that it is Standham I'm thinking of, too. I want your advice,

fellows. It has seemed to me that if you chaps will stand by, we can win. Sometimes it has seemed to me as though it was the only way to win. You have given me the finest support a captain could ask all the season. I tell you I appreciate it. You've made my job easy.

"The question now isn't which of us is right. The question is, are you going to stand by? I've got to know that. To win, the eleven must be solid, not in opinion, understand, but in loyalty. We can think differently; we must act alike. Can you continue for the rest of the season to give me as captain the loyalty you've given me so far through the fall? If you can't, then my resignation is yours and you must elect a captain who will have your support. If you can give it to me——" Bob hesitated; the boys saw him draw a quick deep breath. "Why, I'll do just the best I can to captain a winning team, that's all. Here's paper. Fulton, Breck, will you act as tellers? I'm going down to Thorn's room now. You'll know where to find me when you want me."

Bob walked down-stairs and opened Thorn's

door. The study was dark and he crossed to the window and stood there looking out. Something very good seemed slipping out of his grasp, something desirable that he had called his. Idiot! Why had he asked the boys to vote by ballot? And why had he gone away and left them? He had not meant so to manage the matter. He clenched his hands until the nails dug into the flesh. The pane felt cool on his hot forehead. "What's the matter with you, Bob Farrar?" he demanded. "What do you want with a position the boys don't want you to have?" "But I could have won," something said over and over inside him. "I almost know I could have won." What would Davenport say? Would the coach understand? Gid, yes, surely Gid would see. But Gid had wanted him to beat Conway. And now——

Bob threw back his shoulders and turned from the window. He snapped the electric button, flooding the study with light. Only a little more than a week, but perhaps Thorn could do it. All the squad admired Clay, they trusted him, too. Who could help it? No doubt but he would hold them. A shake-

up was bad coming so late, of course, but —— If Standham could win!

A door opened, feet raced down the stairs and little Tom bounded into the study.

"They want you!"

Bob gave one glance at the boy's excited face and strode out of the room. A shout greeted him at the familiar door.

"Come in, captain."

"The sense of this bunch is, 'Us for Farrar!'"

Breck and Fulton thrust slips of paper toward him. "See for yourself. Unanimous vote."

"Captain," cried Denslow, "you tell us what to do and we'll do it. Isn't that so, boys?"

"Aye, aye!"

"The ayes have it."

The boys pounded out their good will on whatever solid substance came handiest. "Give us our orders," Hunt shouted.

In the midst of the talking, laughing, hilarious group, Bob stood, trying to find his words and his self-command. "You don't know—I didn't expect you ——" he began. "Are you sure you want it so?"

"Well, now, we like that!"

"Say, Bobbie's fussed."

"Oh, no, we made a mistake, of course."

"Take it all back."

By and by they quieted down and the captain gave them their orders, as Hunt had asked. "To say 'thank you' wouldn't be saying much," he began. "You took me by surprise, you saw that. And I don't need to tell you I'll try to deserve your confidence. That goes without saying, too. You know how things are at Standham just now. The talk will blow by after a while. Before then, fellows will try to get hold of you, and make you think you'd better have done differently. They'll tell you that you're not doing right by Standham. They'll talk about the new play. Now my idea is, meet talk with silence. See? Don't listen. If a fellow begins to spiel, cut him off. Don't let anybody talk to you, and don't talk yourselves. Be deaf. It won't come easy. Fellows will say you're glum and unsociable. Be glum and unsociable then. They'll get over their huffiness. Will you do it?"

"Are those orders, captain?"

"They're orders."

"Me for a Sphinx," said Thorn.

"Not much talk will get past my glare," Breck declared.

"I'll give it to 'em hot off the bat if they keep on," said Scrap.

"You can count on us, Bob," chorused the rest.

Scrap lingered after most of the others had gone. "Bob," he said, "I'm glad you stood out. I wanted to make the idea of playing Ferguson seem all right, and I thought it did at first, but, well, it's just as Jack said, the old thing sounded better'n it felt."

CHAPTER XX

MUM'S THE WORD

"I SENT for you, Farrar," said Mr. Wetherell the next morning, "to ask whether you would like to have me take a hand in the game."

Bob answered the principal with a smile as frank as his own. "I think I'd rather not, if you don't mind."

The other motioned him to a seat beside the desk. "You are getting the boys in hand, then?"

"The eleven is with me. I believe I can count on them after last night. You see I put it to the squad to vote whether they'd support me or choose a new captain and they voted to stand by me."

"Good!" The principal's tone was hearty. "I congratulate you, Farrar, on a vote like that just when most boys, from all I hear, are too excited to see straight. But

you have some cool-headed fellows on the team."

Bob flushed at praise of his men. He wanted to say something of what he felt about them, but words did not come easily. "They're all right," was what he did say, and Mr. Wetherell understood.

"They are," he agreed. "I am proud of them and of you, Farrar, for the way in which you have handled this situation. It has not been easy, but that is the kind of fellow we want at Standham, boys who have the grit to say no when it would be easier to say yes. I have been watching this affair pretty closely. The demonstration night before last convinced me that it was time to act. I was on the point of sending for you when Forbes came in to talk to me."

"Was Shorty here yesterday?" Bob's surprise made him forget his manners. "What for?"

"He came to ask me to speak to the school, assuming that if matters reached the point of actually attempting to play Ferguson I should interfere and forbid it. We understood each other pretty well." Mr.

Wetherell smiled. "But if you say so, Farrar, I will continue to leave the affair in your hands. If you boys can settle it among yourselves, and settle it right, the school will gain more than it would from any words of mine. And after all the academy has failed of doing its work if it has not taught boys how to decide such questions as this. You have made a good beginning. Go on to the finish, but remember if you need help at any time I stand ready to give it."

"Thank you, Mr. Wetherell."

The principal held out his hand. "Good luck to you in the game. Tell that team of yours we are counting on them to do Standham credit next week."

In the second floor study at Stone Bob found Shorty. "Who told you to go to the prin?" he demanded.

Shorty scratched his head thoughtfully. "Now who did?" he cogitated. "Who told Shorty to go to the prin? I say, Neddie——"

Scrap interrupted. "What's he been to the office about?"

"I'll bet it was this football row," cried Hunt.

"Search me!" said Ned. "He didn't say anything to his roommate about the trip."

"Is the prin going to butt in?" Hunt inquired.

"It's not buttin' in if he does take a hand," Scrap declared. "It's his business, isn't it? I hope he comes out and says things good and strong."

"Me, too," cried Ned. "How about it, Bob?"

"Not now," said Bob. "Not if we can manage by ourselves."

"And when did he reach that conclusion?" Shorty demanded.

Scrap squealed gleefully. "Thought you'd got him fixed, didn't you, Shorty?"

Shorty ignored Scrap. "You told him to keep out," he accused Bob.

Bob grinned. "A fellow doesn't do that to Mr. Wetherell, does he? But he left it to me whether or not he should talk to the school, and I said not yet, if it was all the same to him."

Shorty groaned. "Talk about Lucifer! He wasn't in it with you, B. F."

"What do you mean?" demanded Bob.

"That's easy." Ned took up the tale. "Know what p-r-o-u-d spells?"

Scrap pounded on his chair. "That's it, Bob, it was just your pride."

"I don't see it," said Bob.

"He didn't want the prin to set him right with the boys, no, he didn't," jeered Shorty.

"All the prin would do," said Bob, "would be to tell the fellows Ferg couldn't play, no matter who went on for Conway. And if that would make 'em think me fine and dandy, why, let 'em be down on me then. I don't want their smooth words if they come so cheap."

"Hear, hear!" cried Ned. "What did I tell you?"

"Keep cool, Bobby. You're so top-lofty you don't know it. But the rest of us can tell what's as plain as print." Shorty untangled his long legs from the cushions on the couch and sat up. "I've suspected what was the matter all along. Couldn't see why on earth you didn't go to the prin long ago and get him to let a breeze in on this school. Cool their heads. When I drop into the office myself, what happens? Bobby comes along

and says, 'Hands off, Mr. Prin. It's my funeral.'"

"That's just what it looked like yesterday," said Hunt. "A first-class funeral and no mistake."

Shorty hugged his knees meditatively. "The corpse got too lively. It up and did things. Have it your own way, B. F. I'll bank on you to come out ahead after all."

Scrap chuckled. "You just ought to see the way fellows look when they find we won't talk. I say, there's some fun in this mum business, after all, Bob. Chaps come up to you, with words stickin' out all over 'em, fairly radiatin' remarks. There's nothin' like a flat 'Can't say a word, Smith' to take the wind out of their sails. Maybe they're not mad! I didn't think much o' this silence trick last night when Bob put it up to us, but it sure enough takes two to make talk. The way those chaps' faces lengthen out is a caution."

"The boys are sticking to the program pretty tight, are they?" Bob asked.

"Well, I guess!" It was Hunt's turn to chuckle. "That move is a winner, Bob. Oh,

now and then a fellow breaks over, but he pulls himself up short pretty quick."

Scrap and Hunt were right. Bob's policy of silence worked. The school thundered, but the squad was deaf. Boys with grievances against the captain found it impossible to air them before football players. No sooner were they fairly started than their audience melted away. "What good does it do to talk to the school?" grumbled one speaker, thus bereft. "It's the squad that counts."

"And there's where we can't break in," another answered. "Farrar has got the squad solid."

Bewildered, the school fell away from the attack. And the cooler heads among the boys, quick to take advantage of the temporary lull, started quietly a counter current of feeling. Thorn and Jack and Shorty and Denslow were to be reckoned with, and now that the first excitement had passed, their influence helped to swing the academy back to steady footing. Shorty and Thorn, the one in jocose drawls, the other in quick, snappy English, let it be known where they stood. Jack threw all the weight of his office against fur-

ther agitation, while Denslow, who had experienced what it meant to have the school down on him, went out of his way to champion Bob.

"You fellows haven't a leg to stand on," he declared. "You've been mixing up in something that's none of your business. The captain says who plays and what is played, and if this school hasn't learned that fact yet, why, it doesn't know the A B C of athletics."

It was not to be expected that the majority of the school would immediately face about in opinion. As Thorn put it, "Farrar's stock is pretty well below par just now." But danger of any further outbreak of excitement had been averted. The academy indulged itself in gloomy prophecies of future defeat, prophecies which, curiously enough, met their first, though not their last, rebuke from an unexpected quarter.

"If I felt like that," said Bolton, "at least I'd keep still about it."

The prophets stopped prophesying and gazed at him in surprise. "What do you know about football, Dave?" demanded one of them.

"Not much, I'll admit. Just about enough to know that when a school has a team it's the school's business to stand by it."

"Whether you like what the team does or not?"

"Just so."

"But we haven't the ghost of a chance against Conway."

"Since when?" Bolton surveyed the group deliberately. "If you really think that, I say again it's your business to keep still about it."

He broke away from the boys and turned off toward Stone Hall. At the door he met the captain.

Bolton halted. "Farrar," he said, "you know I'm not an authority on football. I've never been very keen about it, either, but I'd give all my old hats to see you win next Saturday."

"I'd give all mine to win, Bolton," said Bob.

"And I just want to say this," Bolton went on, "I've wished a hundred times this last week that I'd never seen that letter to Button."

"I'll subscribe to that, too. You're going to the game?"

Bolton's answer was more laconic than elegant. "You bet!"

Bob recounted the conversation to Shorty as they strolled down from the post-office that night. "Bolton's coming on," he commented.

Shorty turned at a hail from behind and halted his companion. "Remember what I said about Bolton and this Conway game, B. F.? That's going to polish him off into an A Number One Standham rooter."

Tom Thompson bore down on them, waving a letter.

"She's coming! She's coming!" he announced, his cheeks red with excitement.

"Who's coming?" Bob inquired.

"Sue, my cousin, you know."

"Ha!" cried Shorty. "The coöperative one. Bully for her. The memory of those chocolate creams is with me yet. She'll bring a supply along, Tommy? Good market, Standham. I hope you've told her."

"A person doesn't have to tell Sue things like that," Tom answered.

"Discerning cousin!" Shorty murmured.

"Me for her. Be sure you save the best dates for yours truly. She'll want to meet a fellow who isn't in training."

"Tom," said Bob, "be sure you make your cousin understand that we break training Saturday night. Shorty's a p-i-g."

Tom laughed happily. "Oh, she'll save some for you. Maybe I'll ask her to keep 'em all till Saturday night. She's coming Friday afternoon, you know."

"Who's a pig now?" asked Shorty. "I didn't think it of you, Tom. So young and yet so base!"

Here Thorn added himself to the group. He too had a letter. "Dyce is due Friday. Shall we let him come?"

"Let him come?" Shorty inquired. "How are you going to stop him?"

"Telegraph."

"But why shouldn't he come?" gasped Tom. "He wants to see us win, doesn't he?"

His glance followed that of the two others to Bob's face. The captain's chin set a trifle more squarely. "I reckon we won't telegraph him, Clay," he said.

CHAPTER XXI

TOM'S CANDY COUSIN

On the station platform at Eastville Tom tramped impatiently up and down. The train had begun by being ten minutes late. Now it was twenty. Every little while the boy made excursions into the waiting-room to look at the clock. They had missed one car, he reflected, and they stood a good chance of losing another. He thrust his hands into his pockets and tramped on. Practice would be over by the time they reached Standham, the mere limbering up that Bob had planned for to-day. But he had meant to take Sue down to the field and let her see the squad, just to get an idea of it before the game. The squad was worth looking at, Tom thought.

Half an hour. Why were the trains you took an interest in generally late and those you didn't care about always on time? A whistle and a growing rumble answered him. An engine turned the curve of track. The

boy's face fell. Only a string of freight cars. Who cared about them? He watched them run by, idly reading the names as they passed. These cars foregathered from many states. The freight out of the way, Tom watched the baggageman wheel a loaded truck into position beside the track. It looked as though he really expected something to happen.

When he had begun to wonder whether they could by any possibility miss a third trolley, the train rumbled around the curve, clattered over the bridge, and slowed up beside him. And in a minute more his cousin Sue stepped lightly to the platform, in a suit which even to Tom's eyes approached the color of his heart. Sue's clothes weren't gray or black, no, they surely were purplish. And Sue's eyes were laughing at him from under a wide-brimmed hat of the same queer color that somehow made them look more like hothouse violets than ever. She shook hands with him warmly,—it was one of the many things Tom liked about her that she never kissed him when people could see her do it—and yielded her suit case to his grasp quite as she would have given it to her brother Philip.

"You good old Tom!" she cried. "Did you think I'd never get here? I began to think that. But haven't you grown taller since summer?" Then at Tom's look the laugh spread from her eyes and twinkled all over her face. "Will I do, Tom? It's my new suit and I wore it on purpose for Standham."

The wind blew wisps of yellow hair into her eyes and she brushed them back with one hand. "Will I do, Tom?" she teased.

"You bet you'll do," said Tom. "But how'd you know Standham's color?"

"How?" They were running down the iron stairs leading to the street and the trolley line. "How do I know a good many things about Standham? A little bird told me, of course. Or else I dreamed it."

Tom laughed. "You dreamed all right. Say, but the fellows are crazy about you."

"About my candy, you mean. That's what makes the suit case so heavy. How's your friend Bob?"

Before they reached Standham the visitor was in possession of the history of the past fortnight, of Standham's hopes and fears, and

of a knowledge of all that hung on the outcome of the next day.

"We'll win," said Tom with loyal faith. "Bob's made up his mind to that. He doesn't say much, but what Bob Farrar sets out to do he does. The school don't believe he will. They're scared. Fellows talk about Button and Prang and Fuller as though they knew football from A to Z. Maybe they do, but they can't beat Bob. Why, Sue, if we shouldn't win to-morrow—but we've got to win. It isn't just to beat Conway now, it's to make fellows see what kind of a captain we've got. They're blind as bats. Oh, they yell for him, you know, but the sound is different. There isn't the same ring to it there was a month ago. Farrar knows it, too. We've just got to win!"

Sue nodded her curly head. "I like Bob Farrar," she said.

Tom needed no more encouragement to talk about his hero. The girl listened as she had listened before, and watching Tom's look, wondered whether the captain were indeed all that her cousin pictured him. The boy's tongue ran on, story after story falling from

his lips. What Bob had said to this boy, how he had pulled off that difficult play, how he had talked to the squad. The words were simple enough, uncolored and plain, twisted now and then into quaint phrases, but between them and through them ran the current of eager admiration that the younger boy felt for the older, a shy thing, revealing itself unbidden and quite unknown to Tom. "Of course I like Bob," he would have said, had one pressed him with a direct question. "Bob's the biggest fellow in school. And besides, who has a better right to like him?"

Several figures were waiting near the car line when Tom and Miss Dane descended the steps. Not finding the person aboard whom the loungers had come to meet, they transferred their observation to Tom's companion.

Shorty broke away from the rest and strolled over. "Didn't see anything of Gid Sloane, did you, Tom?"

Tom had not seen Sloane and said so. Shorty waited and introductions followed.

"Tom's candy cousin!" cried Shorty. "I knew it must be you, my mouth acted so."

"How did it act?" promptly inquired Miss Dane with a suspicious dimple in her cheek.

"It watered," said Shorty innocently.

Miss Dane laughed. "You must be the boy who can absorb a five-pound box of chocolates in half an hour."

"An idle tale, a figment of Tom's heated brain." Shorty sighed deeply. Then he brightened. "A fellow never can tell what he's good for till he tries, though. Suit case heavy, Tom? Give it here."

Tom stuck to his burden. "He'd eat everything up before the other fellows got a bite."

The young lady laughed again. "It's something to know where they are, isn't it? Will it help further to know that I had you particularly in mind, Mr. Shorty, in making as many as I did?"

Shorty beamed. "Candy cousin," said he, "if I didn't have to teach the throats of these fellows the way to yell to-morrow I'd take you to the game myself. Gratitude can go no further."

The girl acknowledged the tribute with a

friendly nod. "Thank you, but I want to hear good cheering, you know."

"You shall," said Shorty. "You shall hear as well as see a game worth playing. Isn't that about it, Tom?"

So they escorted Tom's "candy cousin," as Miss Dane became immediately known at Standham, to Stone Hall, and there Shorty left the two, after engaging to show the visitor about the campus the next morning. And then Bob came in and the great question of what to do with the candy rose for settlement.

"Why not hide it in this room?" asked Miss Dane, glancing about Tom's quarters.

"Shorty might take a notion to hunt for it," the boy objected.

"Trust him for that," said Bob. "But what about my study? Jackstraws won't know, and Shorty will never think of looking there."

They smuggled the box into 29, and with much suppressed laughter stowed it away on the shelf of Bob's closet, behind a pile of old running clothes.

"Only the mice will think of getting at it

there." The captain emerged from the depths with rumpled hair.

"Mice!" Tom gasped. "Oh, Bob!"

"If I hear them in the night I'll get up and sling things," Bob assured him.

Tom looked unconvinced; he knew Bob for a sound sleeper.

"The box is stout," said Miss Dane. "Let's call it safe. I suppose it would be breaking training for you to come to dinner with us at the hotel, captain?"

"I'm afraid it would," said Bob. He walked with them as far as the street and the trolley line. "Gid ought to be on this next car. I've been looking for him all the afternoon."

Gid was on the next car. The grip he gave Bob's hand brought a warm glow to the captain's heart. But there were other boys waiting to meet Gid, and a crowd, fed by new accessions every few steps, swept the ex-captain down to Stone. It was not till the evening was half over that Sloane succeeded in finding himself alone with Farrar.

"Where's a busy sign? Chuck it out, quick!" he commanded. "Now tell me about this row."

Gid listened quietly. When it was all told, he spoke. "I'm almost inclined to think I wouldn't use that play, Bob."

Meanwhile the Crowd had much to do. There was Tom Thompson's cousin to be inspected, and once scrutinized the boys buzzed about her like bees around honey. Even Scrap, who detested girls and was afraid of women, forgot himself and expanded genially under her merry friendliness. "She's all right," he pronounced sentence. "Good as another fellow to talk with." Cars were still to be met in expectation of Dyce, who was also late, and this the campers engaged to do in relays. Moreover, an outdoor mass meeting of the academy had been called for nine o'clock, and against that hour certain preparations must be made, including wide distribution of colored fire.

The academy seethed with excitement. Who knew what to-morrow might bring forth? Even the croakers croaked a little less persistently. Tongues ran riot, setting player against player on the two teams.

"Thorn's got Conway's man beat a mile," the tongues agreed. "He's fast and he's

strong and steady as a clock. They can't faze Thorn."

"Nor Farrar, either," somebody asserted.

"Farrar's all right at quarter most times," came the swift response, "but if he depends much on that play to-morrow, the one we fell down on two weeks ago, I tell you, fellows, Standham's a goner sure."

"You can't make Farrar see it."

"Denslow's a star," put in another to turn the talk. "When he's got the ball there's no telling how far it will go."

"Just the same," cried the opposition, "when a team's got a weak spot like we have ——"

"Shut up, can't you? What if we are beaten? There goes the clock. Come out and yell, fellows."

With all shades of despair and hope in their souls, the Standhamites issued from their houses and raced across the campus to Center Hall. The fire blazed brightly, throwing into sharp relief the throng of faces. From a window in Center Tom's cousin looked out on the scene; the noise blared around her. She had heard shoutings such as this before and

her quick ear missed something. Suddenly it was made right. A figure sprang to the steps facing the crowd, and a mighty volume of cheers swelled to greet it.

"That's Gid Sloane," said Tom beside her.

Sloane spoke for the team, for the solid support the school owed its eleven. The ringing sentences carried to the limits of the throng. "Remember this is your team. The eleven will be playing for you to-morrow. Don't forget it. They're not in this for themselves. They're in it for Standham. And Standham is for clean sport. Let your eleven feel you behind it, every fellow of you."

Bob followed with two or three sentences, and after him Davenport. He, too, pled for a solid school. Miss Dane listened critically. There it was again, that something lacking. The spontaneous outburst that had met the last year's captain dropped to a flatter note. She watched the boys. Something mechanical in the steady pumping of shoulders caught her eye. "Some of those fellows are yelling because they think they ought, not because they can't help it," she thought. The school began to shout for the team. There

was no mistaking what Standham thought of individual players. Thorn, Denslow, Hunt, Scrap—how the names boomed out!

The girl found the captain standing beside her. A roar, steady, throat-splitting, went up from the throng outside.

"That's for Ferguson," he said. "The guard we can't play."

For a minute she was silent, listening. Then she spoke. "They will be yelling like that for you to-morrow night."

Bob shook his head. "I'd like to think so. It would mean that we had won."

She turned her head and looked at him. "Are you going to use that new play to-morrow?" she asked abruptly.

The boy returned her gaze, surprised. The words slipped out before he thought. "Gid advises not," he said. "But I promised Davenport——" He stopped.

"Do you believe in the play?" she persisted.

"Yes, I do."

"Then use it," cried the candy cousin. "Use it!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE GAME

Bob opened his eyes and stared at the dawn that looked coldly in at him through the bedroom windows. So he had been asleep after all. This was morning and proved it. He remembered turning and twisting for unnumbered hours last night, determined not to lie awake. Yes, it was morning. Bob burrowed deeper in his blankets. He knew one thing, he never wanted to get up. His mind went ranging through the day's work; his body felt quite content to lie still. It was like a chopped tree, heavy and inert, incapable of motion. A pretty kind of a way to feel before the game! He stretched his arms above his head and, rolling over again, fell into a waking doze.

After a while he heard a stir in the other bed. Jack got up and going to the windows shut them, and turned on the steam.

"B-r-r-r," shivered Jack. He made a grab for his clothes and dived into the study.

its eleven, and what Conway did not know about advertising its presence was not worth knowing.

"Now don't you see?" Tom asked Thorn, drawing off from a heated exchange of civilities with his Conway acquaintance. "Don't you see why we don't love Conway?"

Thorn grinned. "They are rather the whole thing, I'll admit."

"I ran up against one just now," said Bolton. "A little duffer about as high as my shoulder. He took pains to inform me by how much his team expected to beat ours this afternoon, and when I begged leave to differ with him, he acted surprised. It looked too much like the real thing to be all put on."

"That's the trade-mark of the genuine article," Shorty assured him. "They'll be about the most surprised bunch you ever saw if they go home beaten."

"The queer thing about it," Thorn meditated, "is that they are so sure of themselves they almost hypnotize a fellow into thinking they're right."

Bolton's eyes twinkled. "I noticed that, too. Once or twice in the last half hour I've

wondered whether you boys would have the nerve to take their game away from them, if you got a chance."

Thorn shrugged his shoulders. "Trust us to give 'em that kind of a jolt if we can. Where's Bob?"

Jack answered for his absent roommate. "He went over to hold a love feast with Prang."

What his cold plunge had accomplished earlier in the morning for Bob's body, his call at the hotel did for his mind. It started circulation. Prang himself he knew for a straight, well-knit, pleasant-looking fellow with a rather quick temper. He found him now in a sanguine mood which his politest efforts could not quite conceal. From hall and piazza chance remarks reached Bob's ears. He saw Fuller, the center of a crowd of admirers. The hotel reeked with confidence and expectation. There was no bravado about it; Conway, as Bob recognized, honestly expected to win. Instead of depressing him the knowledge, thus pounded into his brain by sight and sound, stirred his combative spirit.

Button's name, spoken outside the door,

came to his ears. He turned to Prang with a question. "Which is Button? He's new this year to the football team, so I've never seen him."

The big, loose-jointed youth pointed out had an honest face.

"I say, Farrar," said Prang, "I was a little hot, maybe, about that eligibility matter. But you can see for yourself Button's no cheat. He doesn't look it, and his looks set him out fair enough. How did you get hold of that letter business?"

Bob outlined the story of the missent letter. and followed it up with the conversation over heard on the train.

Prang listened, his face growing more sober as the tale went on. "I don't know what it means," he said. "It can't mean the full-back, that's sure. Why didn't you tell me the whole thing?"

"I didn't get much encouragement to do that, did I?"

The other met Bob's look squarely. "No, that's a fact, Farrar. I've most forgotten what I said, though. Was it pretty nasty?"

"It didn't invite further explanations."

Bob grinned. He rather liked Prang, face to face.

"Then you dropped the subject." Prang measured his Standham rival with his eye. "What made you do that?"

"You had made it clear enough you held Button eligible. I couldn't very well keep on protesting your word."

Prang looked at Bob hard for another minute. "You're white, Farrar," he said. "I know some captains who—well, we'll let that go. But when I get back to school I'll sift this matter to the bottom and let you know what I find out. Only—just tell your eleven that the Button they're playing against is all right."

The two captains parted with mutual good will. Prang walked with Bob as far as the street. "Till two o'clock," he said.

"Till two o'clock," Bob answered.

"The Prangs are good fellows," said Davenport after hearing Bob's account. "I knew two of the brothers at Harvard, and a man could bank on their word."

At last it was two o'clock. Gid walked down to the gymnasium with Bob, talking

vague nothings which neither knew nor cared about. Suddenly Gid's hand dropped to his companion's shoulder. "Nervous, Bob?" he asked. "Let me tell you something the head coach said to the captain before our last game. He saw the captain was keyed up. 'That's good,' he said in his quiet way. 'We'll have a fine game. Nervous beforehand means cool at the crisis.' We won."

"I hope it means that always, Gid. I never felt before quite as I've felt to-day."

Sloane's words proved the final spur. It was with the old sure note in his voice that the captain turned for a last word with his men. "There's just one thing I have to say. The first time we get anywhere near Conway's goal line, score. If we fail of a touch-down then, we're beaten. Understand? Make it and the game is ours."

The next minute they were out on the field amid a pandemonium of noise. Two minutes later the Conway team appeared and the yellow half of the grand stand rose like one man to meet it. The visitors won the toss and chose the east goal. A light southwest wind was blowing. The teams fell into line. Hunt

kicked off for Standham and the ball landed squarely in the arms of the Conway quarter-back. He started to run with it, and made three yards before he was thrown. Button let off a punt which went out of bounds at Standham's thirty yard line. Denslow followed this up with a fake kick that won him five yards through Conway's center. Bob next took the ball for a punt. It sailed over the heads of the Conway backs, who had looked for another fake, counting on Hunt to do Standham's punting. The surprise cost them dear. Button muffed the ball and it rolled from Conway's thirty yard line toward the goal. Like a flash Peters had gathered it in his arms and started to run. The lines passed under his feet. He was eleven yards from the goal when Button brought him down. Bob sent in Denslow and in two rushes he gained eight yards. The Conway line stiffened to meet the full-back. But Thorn opened a hole in another part of the defense, and instead of Denslow it was Bob who slipped through for a touch-down.

In the first five minutes of play Standham had scored! The home school could hardly

believe the witness of its eyes. The candy cousin, a loyal spot of color, shook her purple flag wildly, while Tom Thompson, quite unconscious of what he was doing, hugged her ecstatically. Nobody saw him. Nobody saw Bolton, his cap off, his mouth open, his face aflame, whacking Dyce over the shoulders with the stick of his flag. Dyce himself was too busy whacking Bolton to notice anything peculiar in the action. All Standham was on its feet, shrieking, pounding, cheering.

Down on the field the eleven responded to the thrill of victory. They had discovered what they could do, and it encouraged them. Conway was there to be beaten. But Conway speedily demonstrated that it held other views. The eleven had not looked for such spirit and dash as Standham had displayed. They were surprised, more surprised than they would have cared to own. This was a team, it appeared, worth fighting. With a new respect for their opponents they settled down to show them how Conway played football.

The result was a contest that marked the day with red letters in the football history of

the two schools. It was not only a close game, and a clean hard game, but it was a contest all over the field. Prang set out to prove that his eleven also could make touchdowns. Button assaulted Peters' end for thirty-two yards and Prang worked on up to Standham's twenty-five yard line. There Conway met a rock in Thorn and lost the ball to Standham on downs. Bob promptly punted it, as he thought, out of harm's way, but he had counted without the Conway quarter, from whose loving embrace the pigskin began its return march down the field. By this time Prang had learned several things about the enemy, one of them being that it was worse than useless to assail Standham's center. The left guard was a much less dangerous person. Acting on this discovery he set Fuller to tearing holes in Standham's defense, while he himself undertook to engage Thorn. It was soon borne in upon Prang, however, that here was a player who could do two things at once. He found this out when Conway lost the ball on Standham's fifteen yard line. But three minutes later Standham was penalized for holding and the

ball went back perilously near the goal posts. The punt fell short, and Conway had the ball again, on the twenty-five yard line.

Prang, after an attempt at the line, dropped back to have a try from placement. Hunt blocked the kick and Fuller fell on the ball for Conway. The next rush yielded only a yard, and again it was Standham's ball. Bob sent Denslow crashing through for five yards. Then Standham fumbled. This gave Conway its chance. The goal was only twenty yards away. In the scrimmage the yellow's left guard had been hurt. The enemy substituted a new man. Fresh and strong he came against the Standham line, and in five rushes the purple was forced back for a touch-down. A goal followed. Six to six.

To score made Conway feel so well that they did it again, after getting by Peters for a fifty yard run, and the first half ended with the visiting academy six points to the good. The fact was not lost on the yellow end of the grand stand, which proceeded to make the Standham rooters aware of it also. "As if we didn't know it already," Tom's cousin said a bit ruefully.

Sloane found the Standham eleven sucking lemons and listening to the coach. "Buck up now," Davenport was urging; "you fellows act half asleep. Soak 'em this next half. Soak 'em for fair. You can do it. Can't they, Sloane?"

"They sure can," said Gid, "if they only think so. Those Conway chaps have put out the best that's in 'em. You fellows—why, you've only just begun to play! That first five minutes was good work. Match it in the next half hour."

The two teams faced each other at the end of the intermission, grim and determined. In the grand stand boys sat on the edge of the seats, clenching their fists in excitement. Bob swept the field in a long quiet survey before he settled to position, with a joking word to Denslow. The players near caught the sentence; those farther off saw the smile that went with it. Standham drew a deep, steady breath. It knew its captain was most dangerous when he grinned.

The struggle began again. The two teams swayed together near the middle of the field, surging now toward one goal, now toward the

other. Conway tried a forward pass, but lost the ball on Hunt's tackle. Prang recovered it in the next play. Conway rounded Peters' end for fourteen yards, and Standham began to fall back. Bob knew very well what was the matter. Fuller had found a new way of taking advantage of that fatal weakness in the purple line. Prang tried for another goal from placement and again Hunt blocked the kick and fell on the ball for Standham.

But this sort of thing must stop. The captain's lips set firmly.

"Sorry, Pete," he said, "but you're tired. You've done a lot. Give another fellow a chance."

Peters understood. Without a word he trotted off to the side lines, and Bob beckoned to Scrap Hayes. Scrap gave a little whoop of delight, and hurried into place. Breck was substituted at left tackle. The signals piped sharply. The purple rooters smothered a groan as they saw Standham's guards, tackles, and ends move to either side. The Conway captain hesitated. He remembered that he had been warned against this play by a boy who had seen Standham's game a fortnight

before. It meant an end run was coming. He signaled his men to move over. The ball snapped back. Standham held its breath. And then in a flash Denslow went through the open space in the center, and was off like a streak down the field. Conway started in pursuit. But Standham interfered with a fierceness the visitors had never before met that fall. Down the field together pounded the full-back, quarter and center, drawing on to meet two Conway backs. Thorn bumped his man effectively. Bob made straight for Button. The latter did his best to dodge around and get the runner, but for a precious half second Bob held him off. Button tackled Denslow desperately—but just too late. The ball was over the goal line. And the score was tied!

Again the purple rooters went mad. They leaped and laughed and shouted, hugged each other and capered about as though in truth they stood on a red-hot gridiron. And the noise they had made before was as nothing to the noise they made now. Anybody would think it must be the best they could do, but it wasn't. A few minutes later they proved

it, when Bob signaled the same formation again and Prang, uncertain what move to expect, held his line to the middle of the field. The ball snapped from center to quarter, then to Denslow and to Scrap, and when Conway downed the runner it was on their twenty yard line. The next five minutes of play will go down in history as the most exciting minutes of the most exciting game known to the football annals of the two schools. In vain Conway stiffened to meet Standham's advance. The purple held to the ball, and either Denslow or Bob persistently plunged through holes that Thorn never failed to open before them. And just when on the grand stand both sides were holding their watches in fear and anxiety, Bob fell back for a kick and the ball sailed clear and true over the goal posts.

Nobody heard the timekeeper's whistle for the noise.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH FARRAR?

STANDHAM streamed over the field and laid hands on its players, hoisting them to sturdy shoulders. Bob looked down on a throng of upturned, open-mouthed faces. They surged about him, mad with joy. Captured by an idea, the mass began to move. Around and around the gridiron marched the procession, taking on order as it went. Lurching at the head of the line, the captain rode in an orgy of rejoicing. Boys raced alongside, shouting unintelligible plaudits. Heicher had a shoulder under him; Blair was not far off.

"What's the matter with Farrar?"

"He's—all—right!"

How the words boomed out! He caught a glimpse of Bolton, his cap off, his tie under one ear, panting as he raced, but yelling manfully. Bob leaned over and shouted to Shorty.

"Look at that, Mr. Merlin."

"What?"

"Bolton!"

"Can't," returned Shorty laconically. "Want me to drop you? What's he doing?"

"Yelling," said Bob.

Shorty took a new grip on Bob's leg. "Let him yell."

In front of the grand stand the line halted to cheer for Mr. Wetherell. The principal waved his hat boyishly.

"It was a great game," he cried. "I congratulate the captain and every man on the squad. I congratulate you all on a victory fairly earned."

The school again took up its victorious march. On the way they yelled for everybody, from the captain to the smallest scrub, who happened to be Tom Thompson. Ferguson was not forgotten. At last, weary, happy, excited, they came to the gymasium. A Conway player was just slipping out as the head of the procession neared the building.

"Fellows," cried Shorty, "here's a three times three for Conway. Hit it up now. One—two—three ——"

They gave the cheer with a will, and the Conway boy turned to wave his cap as he hurried toward the street.

The players betook themselves to rub-downs and showers. Wrenched ankles were attended to and bruises soothed with liniment. They dressed slowly, discussing the game. Why not take plenty of time? Football was a thing of the past for another season. Davenport passed from boy to boy with words of praise for his play. Every little while he returned to slap the captain on the back. Gid Sloane's face shone with joy. "Bob," he cried, "you ought to be the happiest chap in Standham to-night!"

Bob grinned. "I'm happy enough."

"You were right about that formation," said Gid, "you and Davenport."

In the evening the academy celebrated. It was the biggest jollification Standham had seen for years. Toward the end the Crowd slipped away to Bob's room. There Jack and Shorty had prepared for a spread which the candy cousin had finished making ready while everybody was busy outdoors. The occasion gave the members of the team a chance to

demonstrate that they were as good at fudge-cake and ice-cream as at tackling Conway on the gridiron. Bob even succeeded in tying Shorty for first place as a consumer of chocolate creams, though Shorty has always declared that Tom and Ned Hensley lost count and that he was really one ahead when the box was emptied. The celebration broke up with a cheer for the candy cousin, delivered huskily but with fervor.

On Monday afternoon Bob heard from Captain Prang. Shared with two or three boys in the post-office, the news swiftly spread through the school.

"It was the other Button," wrote Prang, "the high stand man. It seems he got a condition last term, and, feeling sore, kept it dark. When we got back here Saturday night, we found that the grind books had come. They don't go on sale till to-day, but I got a look at one beforehand. The grind is just as the fellow told it on the train. So I connected with the roommate and we talked to Button, D. F. Button. By the way, the full-back's initials are D. T. He came out square and showed us the letter. I'm glad we have cleared the thing up at last. Set it right at Standham,

won't you? I hear there was something of a row about it over there.

"If you're ever around here, look me up. That was a game Saturday. PRANG."

Blair read the letter that night in Bob's room. "Will somebody take me out and kick me around the house?" he besought.

Nobody stirred.

"Oh, that's all right," said Bob.

"You're all right, you mean," the editor answered.

"You fellows had reason to be stirred up," Bob went on. "Let's drop it."

Heicher spoke from the couch. "It's lucky we had a captain who kept cool. If we'd gone ahead and done a few of the things we wanted to do, where'd this school be now?"

Scrap jumped up excitedly. "What's that?" he asked. "Listen!"

Jack threw open the window. From the November darkness without came a sound as of many feet, drawing steadily nearer. A dark mass rounded the dormitory wall and spread out over the grass.

Jack drew in his head. "You're wanted, I guess, Bob."

"Farrar! Farrar!! Farrar!!!" shouted the school below.

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